

# **IRISH WRITING**

THE MAGAZINE OF  
CONTEMPORARY IRISH LITERATURE

Edited by

**DAVID MARCUS**

and

**TERENCE SMITH**

NUMBER SIX

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## D. D. O'MAHONY



### The Prize

WHEN the car broke down, Larry got out, lifted the bonnet and bent to look into its old-fashioned and capricious interior with a thoughtful frown. The frown was to impress his sister. He was nineteen and didn't know as much about the engines of motor cars as he pretended. Mary wasn't impressed, but, like a tactful girl, she waited in silence until he had finished his examination. He straightened up, rather red in the face.

'No go,' he said, beginning to wipe his hands on a wisp of grass.

'What had we better do?'

'Lowry's is the nearest place—'

'Umm—' said his sister, ambiguously. Then: 'Even if we do go up there, what can they do for us?'

'May be something I missed,' he admitted unwillingly. 'And, if the worst comes to the worst, they might give us a tow home.'

'Someone passing by—' began Mary.

'Crowds of them, aren't there?' he murmured sarcastically. They were on a little-frequented, back road about ten miles from home.

'Well, we'll wait awhile, anyhow, and see,' decided Mary.

They did, for nearly an hour. Larry tinkered and tapped at the engine for the length of it without result. No one came by.

'Would you go up there alone?' Mary said at last.

'I don't mind. Ach, but you might as well come on up with me as be sitting here by yourself. It's going to rain, too.'

As she got out of the car, a little premonitory shudder ran across the face of a grain-field on the opposite side of the road; overhead, the leaves of a tall ash sighed in the sudden breeze. Though it was only a few minutes' walk to Lowry's gate, scattered rain-drops as big as half-pennies began to fall before they reached it, and half-way up the short garden-path they,

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had to race for the shelter of the porch as a thunder-shower swished down like a flail.

Out of breath, Larry pointed to the knocker. Mary nodded. She must knock, explain their necessity, produce the apologies and polite murmurings suitable to the occasion. She looked resentfully at her brother, knowing why he had insisted on her coming.

The knocker had been painted over, and the sound it made was a sort of muffled thud. No answering sound came from inside the house.

'Perhaps they saw us coming and don't want to open,' whispered Mary. 'There's something about those Lowrys—. Listen, Lar, perhaps they're out. Let's not wait.'

But, Larry, whistling under his breath, paid no attention, only pointed again to the knocker.

In response to her second knock, a dog barked away at the back of the house. Soon, there were footsteps inside and the door was opened by Mrs. Lowry herself. She was a small woman. Her fading prettiness suggested a rather dependent sweetness of character, but this was contradicted by the briskness of her manner when she spoke. She cocked her head to one side enquiringly, now, as she looked from one to the other.

Mary began shyly: 'The car broke down, Mrs Lowry—and we wondered if there was anybody would know what was wrong—if it wouldn't be too much trouble—or give us a tow—.'

At this point, Larry stuck his finger into the small of her back to indicate she'd said enough. The brotherly criticism, so suddenly communicated, unnerved her. She faltered and stopped.

Mrs Lowry said, 'Come in, come away in won't ye,' and, as she led the way to the sitting-room, went on, 'I hope no one's been hurt?'

They both began volubly to explain it wasn't an accident.

'Thank God!' said Mrs. Lowry, piously. 'I have a holy horror of accidents.'

'It just stopped,' Larry explained, giving her one of his sudden attractive smiles. 'I tried everything I could think of. Of course, it's an old car and there might be something I missed.'

'Indeed there might!' murmured Mary, still feeling the dig

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he had given her.

'As long as ye weren't hurt—that's all that matters,' said Mrs. Lowry comfortably. 'And we might be able to help. My husband is very knowledgeable about cars and things. He went out about half-an-hour ago, but this rain will drive him home I'm certain.' As she spoke she was examining them with a kindly but curious air. Suddenly, she decided to be frank, and, wrapping the admission in an added motherliness said: 'You know—I feel I ought to know you. You're brother and sister, of course. But your name—'

'Dunne,' Mary explained quickly. 'We live over at B——. I'm Mary and this is Larry.'

'Dunne!' Mrs. Lowry almost started. 'But I should have recognised you. I knew there was something familiar about you both.'

Outside, the sky darkened still further, and the rain swept down pitilessly. Within the small, stiff room the atmosphere had changed too. Mrs. Lowry picked herself up quickly and kept up a barrage of remarks. Hoping the rain would clear up soon. Hoping her husband wouldn't get soaked. Hoping there was nothing much the matter with their car. But Mary felt a little pricking down her spine. 'There's something—' she thought. And catching Larry's eye for a second, knew he had sensed it too. 'Oh! to be out of here!'

'Mrs. Lowry,' she blurted out, 'as Mr. Lowry's not at home, hadn't we better go on? I mean to say—'

'Out in that?' The little woman waved a hand towards the window. 'Now I ask you, child!'

'Yes—but—'

'Mary.' Larry's face turned towards her and away from Mrs. Lowry was rigid with disapproval. She'd hear about this later on, his look said.

Silenced for the moment, she turned miserably to the window, and watched the water streaming down the panes. But she would try again. She turned to find Mrs. Lowry looking at her.

'I only meant—intruding on you like this—'

'Mary Dunne,' Mrs. Lowry spoke the name softly, and smiled, but Mary felt her ready blush rising to her cheeks and even extending down the tops of her arms in a warm tide. It was quite a relief when, just then, a flash of lightning made a great white rent in the afternoon. Mrs. Lowry, distracted, murmured a parenthetic 'Goodness!' and then

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continued in her usual briskly kind voice: 'I used to know your mother very well at one time. Tell me, how is she?'

Mary, a little reassured, said her mother was 'Very well, thank you,' which, she had learned at her Convent Boarding School, was the correct response to such enquiries.

'And which of you is the elder?'

'I am. Larry's over a year younger than I. I'm the eldest of all.'

'And you have sisters?'

'No, worse luck. Four other brothers besides Lar.'

'Glory be! That's a great family of boys, to be sure, God bless ye all.'

Outside, the rain still poured down, and the rumble of thunder came more frequently, and louder. Larry was watching what was to be seen of the storm through the window. Mary envied his absorbed air as she matched Mrs. Lowry's platitudes with her own.

'It's terrible,' murmured the latter. 'I haven't seen anything like it for years.' She looked somewhat worried and anxious. Mary wished she was quite sure the anxiety had something to do with the weather.

A door banged suddenly in the house, and Mrs. Lowry left her chair as if propelled by the sound. 'Excuse me,' she murmured, and hurried out of the room.

'Larry,' whispered Mary, urgently, the minute the door had closed.

'Uh?' he grunted, without turning.

'We oughtn't to have come here! Did you notice when I said who we were?'

'Oh, don't be fussy.' He looked down at her and turned again to the window with a fine display of inattention.

'I never wanted to come here. I knew there was something. Oh, Larry,' she begged.

'Don't weep about it,' he said crushingly. 'They can't eat you.'

'Oh,' choked Mary, really on the verge of tears but saved by this astringent reference to them. 'You—you're so stupid!'

'Hush,' he warned. 'Someone coming.'

They were standing close together in the window recess. Heavy footsteps approached, ceased, sounded again on the staircase that began just outside the room. Overhead a door banged. Then silence, and the murmur of the rain crept into the room once more.

'It's getting lighter, Lar.' Mary put a coaxing hand on his

elbow. 'Let's make some excuse and get away.'

'No,' he said flatly. 'What's wrong with you to-day?'

The explosive irritation of his tone brought her up short. Surely she was letting her nerves run away with her. Perhaps it was the thunder. It makes you jumpy, often. And after all, if they never mentioned the Lowrys at home, what of it? They lived a good distance away.

The clouds were beginning to lighten. There was a faint, brassy glow behind the grey. The rain, though still heavy, looked less uncompromising. Mary's spirits went up. Surely, even if there were something, she, at the ripe age of twenty and a half, ought to be able to handle a delicate situation.

'Come here and watch the sparrows,' said Larry, pointing out an overgrown laurel in the garden. It was alive with angry little birds. Directly the sky began to clear, they started to twitter crossly. One or two fluttered out, but finding the rain still unpleasantly heavy, returned at once to their arc and to the scolding of their disturbed fellows.

Larry and Mary were laughing at their antics when Mrs. Lowry returned. She was a little flushed, but the kindness with which she had first greeted them, was still in her voice. Mary was completely reassured.

'That was my husband,' said Mrs. Lowry. 'He was soaked. He's gone up to change. And now I'm just going to make a cup of tea. I won't stand on ceremony but bring you right into the kitchen. You won't mind—'

'We'd be delighted,' Mary blushed earnestly. 'I hope we're not an awful bother.'

'What bother, child,' said Mrs. Lowry, heartily. 'As soon as the rain clears, John will go down and have a look at the car.'

Her husband joined them after ten minutes or so. A big, spare man with coarse grey hair threaded with black growing straight up from his forehead and making a sort of halo above his thin ruddy face. He looked them over coolly. Mary's blush began to rise, and even Larry warmed under his gaze.

'These are the Dunnes, John,' said his wife.

He held out a big hand to Mary. 'You have a look of your mother,' he said.

Mary got redder. 'I don't know. Larry's like Daddy though.'

'You're like she was when she was your age. I don't know what she's like now.' There was a second's pause, dur-

ing which he looked past her. Then he turned and shook hands abruptly with Larry. 'You're like your father all right,' he said. 'And going to be a Priest?' He seemed to get some amusement out of this.

The boy looked uncomfortable, but he summoned up his smile. 'God willing,' he said.

'Indeed, yes!' Mrs Lowry was hearty and motherly. 'Your mother must be glad. It's a great privilege to be the mother of a priest.'

'God willing!' echoed her husband, with a mischievous look at her that made her redden with annoyance, and throw him a warning look.

She did most of the talking while they were at tea. Her husband hardly spoke at all, and Mary felt her uneasiness slowly returning. Though it was still raining when they had finished, Mrs Lowry seemed anxious to hurry them away.

'Stir yourself, now, John,' she urged. 'These children won't want to be too late on the road.'

He only delayed till he had his pipe going nicely, then nodded to Larry. Mary got up too, but he said:

'You'd better stay here, young lady, until we find out what's wrong.'

So she had to stay, though she thought there was a rather inhospitable ring about Mrs. Lowry's repeated instructions to her husband as he went out to 'Try and fix it up quickly, for goodness sake.'

Her sea-saw feelings levelled out once more a few minutes later when her hostess, busily clearing the table, gratefully accepted her shy offer of help, and set her to wipe the ware as she washed up.

'We've no girl at the moment,' she explained. 'I hope to goodness Nora will bring news of someone to-night. She's gone in to the town to the Show. She has some fowl in it.'

'Your daughter?' asked Mary.

'Ah, no. John's sister. You must have heard of her.'

'I might have,' said Mary, cautiously. 'But it's slipped my memory.'

'Your father knows her—and your mother too. At least they knew her well enough long ago.'

'I never heard them speak of her,' began Mary, and guessed she'd put her foot in it when she caught sight of Mrs. Lowry's expression, which for the first time betrayed distinct annoyance.

Mrs. Lowry threw up her head. 'I thought the whole

country-side had heard of Nora,' she said, 'on account of the poultry-farm. She brings home half the prizes from every Show she enters. Then she's Secretary of the local branch of the Countrywomen's Association. And she's something big in the Bee-Keepers' Society. It's wonderful all the interests she has. Wonderful.'

'Yes,' agreed Mary, more than a little bewildered by all this. 'She must be great. Does she live here?'

'Of course. I don't know what we'd do without her. It isn't often you'd hear that from a sister-in-law, but Nora is an exception. I'm expecting herself and Peggy in any time now. Peggy is my eldest girl. She'd be a bit younger than you. Ah, but ye'll be on the road home before they come, I hope.' She paused, reaching up to hang a jug on a high hook. 'I wouldn't like ye to be out late,' she concluded. 'Your mother might be anxious.'

It wasn't very long until Mr. Lowry came back followed by a very sheepish Larry. 'Were you able to make it go?' asked his wife, anxiously.

Mr. Lowry chuckled, and Larry flushed. 'I'm afraid I'm not much of a mechanic, Mrs. Lowry,' he said.

'What harm, what harm,' said the little woman, almost gaily. 'I'm glad, now ye won't be too late on the road. Ye ought to be home before dark if ye go at once.'

'Ach, what hurry's on them,' said her husband, who had become quite genial after his triumph over the recalcitrant car. He was lighting up the lamps that hung on either side of the fireplace. 'The daylight's almost gone at it is.'

'Now, John,' reproved his wife, 'their mother might very well be anxious if they are delayed. Such times as these, when there's an accident every other day on the roads.'

'Yes, Mr. Lowry,' said Mary shyly eager. 'You've been most awfully kind, but really, we've inflicted ourselves on you for quite long enough.'

'No, don't say that,' said Mrs. Lowry, 'or I'll think you've misunderstood me.'

Her husband looked hard at Mary for a moment when he had the lamps alight. Then he grunted, 'As you like.' Almost, thought Mary, as if he'd suddenly remembered something.

Larry went up to him and held out his hand, 'Thanks again, sir,' he said. Mr. Lowry touched the hand with a dry, 'That's all right.' But when Mary shook hands he smiled at her quite nicely, 'Next time you go out in a car pick a driver who knows

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something more than the starting-key,' he advised.

His wife's farewells were hurried. But just as she was ushering them to the door a car drew up outside. A girl of sixteen or so ran into the kitchen crying excitedly: 'Mother, Aunt Nora got the prize. The cup's her own now——' She stopped shyly when she saw the strangers.

Mrs. Lowry took no notice of her. She looked at her husband, and Mary, intercepting the glance, was suddenly frightened. 'This is it,' she thought.

Mr. Lowry's face was blank. He, Mary and Larry were standing in the full lamp-light. His wife was nearer to the door. The twilit world outside looked wan, as if the lamps had drawn all life, mothlike, into their yellow radiance. No one spoke except the girl who kept whispering to her mother something about 'the cup.'

'Hush,' said Mrs. Lowry, sharply.

Then Nora Lowry, tall and erect, stood between the warm light of the lamps and the cold grey of the dying day, her trophy in her arms. 'I've brought it for keeps this time,' she said, a little tilt of jubilation in her voice. She leaned against the jamb of the door, tasting her triumph. But suddenly the pleasure died out of her face leaving it cold and expressionless and very like her brother's. She stared at Larry. It all took perhaps five seconds but it seemed ages to Mary before Mrs. Lowry hustled forward. And then she heard her explanations, her admiration of the cup, only as one hears musical effects behind words. She was watching Miss Lowry, who, her face ablaze now with a sudden flush, put the cup on the table and swept off her hat revealing short, silver-grey hair, crisp like her brother's, which she smoothed back with a large and shapely hand.

'Warm in here,' she said.

'Not a bad little egg-cup,' remarked Mr. Lowry, picking up the big trophy.

'No, is it?' said his sister, coolly.

She nodded and smiled at Mary and Larry in response to their congratulations. 'Yes, I'm rather pleased. Are you going at once?'

'Their mother would be anxious,' explained her sister-in-law.

'Yes, of course.' Mary felt her eyes on them till they were outside.

They walked in silence to the car. 'He knew a bit about

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engines, I can tell you,' said Larry when they were on their way.

'I wish we'd never gone there,' burst out Mary.

'It's hard to please you, I must say. And we'd be below at the cornfield still if we hadn't—'

'I'd rather sit there all night, or walk home,' said his sister, vehemently. Larry shrugged and gave it up.

'What in the world kept you?' asked their mother when they came in.

'Had a breakdown.'

'I told you not to take out that car,' said their father.  
'How did ye get home?'

'Well, you see, we broke down near Lowry's farm, so we went up there and Mr. Lowry went down and fixed it up.'

'Lowry's?' Mary saw the look that passed between her parents.

'What a place ye went!' said her mother. She looked quite flushed and angry.

Their father got up as if the story had no further interest for him. 'You brought the car home all right?' he asked over his shoulder.

'Oh, yes,' said Larry eagerly.

His father took his candle from the dresser and lighted it. 'Don't stay up too late,' he said. He turned as he walked to the stairs. 'Were ye up there long?'

'All through the storm. They gave us tea.'

'Huh! Any port in a storm! Did they know who ye were?'

'Oh, yes, we told them——'

'Very well, have your supper and get away to bed the pair of ye.'

When Larry had gone, Mary went straight to the point with her mother. 'What's between those Lowrys and us?' she demanded.

'What would there be? Did they say something?'

'No, but I felt it, cold like a draught, all the time I was there, especially when Miss Lowry came in.'

'Did she come in?'

'With a big silver cup she'd got for fowl or something at the Show.'

'Yes. She's great for all that sort of thing. Did she know who ye were?'

'Yes.'

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Mrs. Dunne rose. She was a stout woman of forty-five. She must have been very like Mary when she was young but now her fair hair was faded, and on her plump cheeks a little network of veins coarsened her complexion. Mary rose too and pulled her back into her chair. 'You're not going till you tell me,' she insisted.

'Were they nice to ye?'

'Yes—oh, yes and no.'

'How did Nora look?'

'Masterful.'

'Ah, I'd say she would. And Mrs. Lowry? Kate Deasy—I used to be very great with her long ago.'

'She was asking for you.'

'Ah, I always liked Kate. Ah, but when she married John Lowry——'

'What happened?' Mary was breathless with curiosity.

'Oh, it's all ancient history now. But if you must know, your father was keeping company with Nora Lowry before I met him.'

Mary thought of the tall, grey-haired woman, and of her father.

'He was inclined to play about a bit. But everyone expected he'd marry Nora. They were going together for six or seven years. She was nearly thirty that time. I was only twenty. She never married. And they never looked at us afterwards. Ye should walk in there of all places!'

'I knew there was something,' said Mary.

'She was a fine-looking girl.'

'She has an air about her still.' They were silent for a minute and then Mary's curiosity got the better of her discretion. 'Did you know?' she asked.

'Yes, I knew.'

'You didn't mind?'

Mrs. Dunne stared into the fire. 'What was I to do? I suppose I was in love.'

They were silent again. Mary from embarrassment, her mother because she was back in the past.

They both started guiltily at the sound of a voice from the stairs. It was Mary's father. 'Are ye going to stay there all night chattering?' he demanded.

'We're going up this minute,' said his wife. 'Go on Mary. I'll quench the lamp.'

Mary went up obediently. She passed her father on the stairs where he stood holding the candle to light her mother up. Clad only in vest and trousers, his hair on end, he looked

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coarse and grotesque, and only grunted in response to his daughter's good-night.

When she reached her room, Mary plumped down on the side of her bed overcome suddenly by a sort of haunted weariness through which drifted jumbled impressions of the past few hours. She seemed to see Nora Lowry standing in the doorway with her silver cup; her father on the stairway, his face blazing red above his white neck in the light of the candle; her mother's sad earnestness, 'I suppose I was in love—'

Even here, alone and in the dark, her cheeks burned at the memory of this. She rose abruptly, went to the open window, and kneeling down rested her arms along the sill. From the damp garden a sweet fragrance arose. A young moon, pale, calm, remote, rode between two banks of cloud trailing a veil of faint light about her. Clearly from across the fields came a curlew's cry, lonely and free. 'Lovely,' said Mary half-aloud, soothed by the peace of it all, so far removed from smothering human feelings.

'To be a bird,' she thought dreamily.

But that brought back the quarrelling sparrows in the laurel bush at Lowry's. A faint smile relaxed her lips. Her sense of outrage began to slip away with the first faint stirring in her of a sense of comedy.



## DOMHNALL O'CONAILL

### He's Your Brother

BRIAN held his cold fingers around the hot teapot while his mother cut three slices of bread for him. An old newspaper covered the table, stains of tea and masses of crumbs hid any chance he would have of picking out words that he could read. "It's very cold, mamma," he said to her as she lifted the teapot and left his fingers curving around the cold air of the tenement room. She didn't answer, only poured out his tea and passed him the dark grey sugar bag. He looked at her before helping himself. She deliberately turned her head away, so he knew that she'd say nothing about him taking two spoons of sugar. As he lifted the hot tea to his mouth his eyes met hers. The tears there gave her a look of being years younger for they softened her eyes. But he was too shy to look at her, and stared away at the dirty tea-cups left by his sisters, the teastain on one of them had formed itself into the pattern of a hand. And after he'd finished his breakfast, he went over to the empty water bucket and took it out of the room.

It was his job to go downstairs to the sink and fill a bucket of water for her. On the second landing, he could see through the big dirty window the white frosted roofs of the sack factory at the back of the house. A big white seagull was squawking on the windowsill. When he reached the tap and turned it on, he held his hand under it for a second too long, and the stream of icy water ran down his jersey sleeve making him shiver. He looked at the frayed wet cuff, as he squeezed the water from it.

Back in the room, he washed his face in lukewarm water his sisters always left after they'd rushed off to work.

"Is it time yet?" he asked his mother as he dried his face with the piece of torn shirt they used for a towel when there was no one but themselves in the room.

"Yes," she answered, without looking at him. He stared at her long uncombed hair. She had been raking out the firegrate

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and dust had settled on her head. There was a rip in the back of her dress, and he could see the old pullover she wore under it that had belonged to Christy.

"Will I be late?" and he wanted her to turn around and look at him so that she'd know that he was sorry she was unhappy.

"Yes," she said, "get off to school like a good boy."

Whenever she called him a 'good boy,' it meant that she was unhappy about his brother. He opened the door and walked slowly down the stairs.

Each door he passed was shut. None of the women that he usually saw standing around the sink gossiping with each other were there this morning. At the hall door, someone had spilt milk; Brian put his foot into the puddle and looked at the white liquid surrounding his black boot. Just for a moment he thought of his brother Christy and how nearly a year gone since those big men had taken him away. He looked back up the bare hallway as far as the stairs. He wished he could have gone up to his mother and told her something good, like he'd found a pound note.

Two policemen were standing talking at the corner of the street. Their red faces glowed like bright fires, and they looked secure and safe behind their buttoned-up warm over-coats. Brian pulled his jersey sleeves down around his hands and walked towards the main road. Just before he turned the corner, he looked back to his house. Their room was at the front and sometimes his mother would look from the window and wave to him. But she wasn't there. His eyes saw the two policemen walking in step past their halldoor.

As he walked along the main road he could see two kids who were in his class walking on ahead of him. They were always early. He walked quickly and reached them.

"Hi, Kelly," he said, and one of them turned and looked at him, and as he did, nudged the other kid. The other kid looked, so Brian asked, "Am I early?"

The kid called Kelly who always wore garters and kept his stockings tidy, said, "Yes, you're in time."

"Were you at the Phoenix last night?" he asked, and Kelly nudged the other kid again, and the two of them began to laugh.

"What ar'yer laughin' at?"

"A joke," said Kelly and laughed again, and to the other kid he said, "He doesn't know a thing about it, does he?"

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"About what?" asked Brian, but the two kids laughed again and Kelly said, "Come on, Joe, we didn't ask you to walk with us, Casey."

The two kids crossed the road and walked on the side where the big houses lay back from the road like fat women squatting in comfortable armchairs. Brian looked over at them, and at the long stretch of road that lay before him.

"Can't you afford the paper at your house," Kelly shouted.

Brian stopped walking and looked into a shop window. It was full of baby clothes. What was in the paper? What was it? He could see a blue woollen jacket, so small that he felt sad just to look at it. What could be in the paper?

For a long time he stared at the baby clothes, then when he looked up the road again, Kelly and the other kid looked even smaller than babies. He began walking.

At the school gates two women were talking and he heard one say, "There's no law an' order here. None. None."

Brian looked at their faces. Two bleak cold noses running down to their narrow lips, their hands trembling with gossip where they held their prayer books.

"Craw thumpers," he said to himself, "in and out of the chapel wanting everyone to be prayin' all the time."

In the playground the boys were standing in groups talking with each other. When one of them would see Brian he'd turn and whisper to the others, and after a second all the boys would look at him, then turn to each other and talk. One crowd he could see were playing some kind of game, so he rushed over to them, and taking his toy pistol from his pocket, shouted, "Hands up, all of you!" They all stopped playing and looked; silent until one of them let out a squeal of laughter and the others joined in.

The bell was ringing. The teacher, a small man with wire-like hair and spectacles, could taste his breakfast coming up his throat and making his mouth bitter. Acid, he thought, that's what I've got. He rang the bell harder, and took the last pulls from his cigarette. His jacket was buttoned up tight, and a white handkerchief that he kept inside his cuff just showed. The boys all began running through the open door, and the ringing bell went on louder and louder until it seemed that the frozen air would splinter. One kid, who was always late, came running by the teacher, his undone shoelace tripped him, and he fell. The teacher, hating his untidy body, reached out to strike him, but his handkerchief

fell from his cuff.

"Byrne," he called to the kid who was just getting up, "pick up that handkerchief."

The kid picked it up, and he smiled hoping the teacher would look kindly at him, or even say thanks. But the handkerchief was snatched from his hand.

Once in class the boys all stood waiting for prayers to begin.

The teacher began and the boys' voices mumbled out after his. The teacher's eyes looked around the class, his hatred for them all silent as he said,

'But deliver us from evil . . .'

He could see the unwashed hands all joined and the acidic taste came into his mouth again. I'll see the doctor, he thought.

When the arithmetic lesson came the teacher chalked on the blackboard

$$72 \div 4 \text{ and the answer } \times 4$$

"Now," he said, "do that quickly."

Brian began . . . four into seven goes twice. . . no, that's eight . . . Once. . . and three over. . . three over. . . three over. . . What's in the paper? Three over and two that makes five. . . There was something in the paper about him? No, he'd know it, if there was. . . Multiply by four and divide by four. . .

The teacher began walking around and looked at the boys' books. To some, he'd say, "Yes, that's right, simple isn't it?" To others he'd say, "Use the few brains you have . . . Use them. . ."

Brian could see him nearing his desk, and quickly looked over to the boy next to him. The teacher's arm reached him and he felt a bang on his head, "Now Casey, don't cheat, do it yourself."

The teacher's dark suit moved down to the front and he asked, "Hands up those who've finished."

Hands came up like flags and Brian went on: Four into seven goes. . . If there's anything in the paper. . . Four into seven won't go. . . four into four and three over. . . All the others had finished, so the teacher shouted out, "Casey has no brains, you tell him Kelly."

Kelly stood up, his voice came like sharp needles of hate. "Four into seventy-two goes eighteen and multiplied by four makes it the same as it was before. Seventy-two, sir."

"Did any boy work it out differently?"

The small red-haired boy who wore thick-lensed glasses and

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never played with any of them, stood up.

"There's no need, sir," he said, "to work it out, sir. If you divide by four, sir, and multiply the answer by four, sir. your answer is bound, sir, to be the number you began with, sir."

He sat down.

"You'll get somewhere, Courtney," said the teacher. "Now, Casey," he said, "where have you got?"

The laughter began somewhere at the back of the class and soon all the boys had joined in. The teacher smiled, but stopped when he noticed Brian's serious face. "Casey has no sense of humour." He walked slowly towards the boy,

"Well, what is the answer?"

"Er. . . er. . . er. . ."

The bell was ringing for lunchtime, and the teacher, relieved that he would have time to get a glass of magnesia, said, "All right, class dismissed."

In the playground when he saw all the kids taking out their lunches, he realised that he had forgotten his. None of the kids talked with him, and when he walked up to them, they talked with each other as though he weren't there. One kid had his mouth full of cake and when Brian looked at him, he opened his mouth and spat a few crumbs of cake out, as he said, "He's your brother, isn't he?"

Brian didn't understand and just stared. So the kid took another bit of cake and with his mouth full, said, "Did they catch him yet?"

"How do you mean?" asked Brian, and the kid whose mouth was full of cake nearly choked with laughing.

He walked away to the wall that was always damp from never having the sun shine on it. Before reaching there, he saw a stone bounce off it. He stood still, waiting for the next stone to hit him. But none came. He stared at the wall, wondering if something magic would happen and he would be able to take one of the bricks and hurl it back at the crowd he could hear laughing behind him.

He felt a hand touch his shoulder and when he turned around, saw one of the bigger boys who wore a man's belt.

"Isn't it your brother they're after?"

"Who's after?"

"The cops is after."

"I dunno."

"Course it is. Is he hiding in your house?"

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Another big boy had come and was looking into Brian's face. "They chased him over the bridge. He was in his bare feet and only had his pants on."

"Look at his face," said the other boy, "look at it. And he pretending all the time he didn't know . . ."

The bell was ringing for them all to go in again. Just as he reached the door, a little snotty nosed kid he'd always hated came up to him. "Me ma," he said, "hopes they don't catch him."

"Catch who?" -

The kid laughed, "Everyone know who. That's what they're all talkin' about. It's your brother that broke out of jail."

And as he went back into class again, he was no longer afraid of the teacher. He understood all.

"Casey . . ." roared the teacher! But Brian didn't hear, he could understand the whole morning so easily.

"Casey."

And Brian looked at the teacher. He hadn't known hatred before that moment in his life; but the teacher's white face, his red nose, his handkerchief, his little book with all the answers in it, all those things were what he hated. And he stared hard at the teacher, making the man see how much he despised and hated him.

"Come up here, and stand in front of the class."

He walked out of his place and up to below the teacher's desk.

"Now," said the teacher, "I'll be able to keep my eye on you."

His brother Christy, bare feet and no shirt, running away from them. Would he be able to get home? Those two policemen, they'd be gone. Everyone would notice a man with no shirt or shoes. Oh God, please kill all the policemen in our street. Oh God, I promise I'll never be a sinner again if you let Christy get home to us. I'll not smoke. I'll not steal again. I'll not peep through keyholes and look at oul' wans gettin' into bed. I'll receive the blessed sacrament every morning of my life . . .

He didn't know that he was crying until he heard the boys laughing, and the teacher saying, "Well, isn't he a coward. Watch Baby cry. . . Watch him. . ."

And he took aim at Brian's ear and knocked him to the floor. Brian got up, all feeling of crying and sadness gone from him. He stood staring at the class, and the laughing

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gradually stopped until only the teacher's voice could be heard saying, "What! Is the joke over so soon?" And Brian looked ahead of him. The boys all looked down at their books.

"Casey," said the teacher, and as though he weren't sure of Brian's name, he said again, "Casey," remembering the name in the paper.

Brian looked at him, and the teacher wanted to say that he was sorry, but he only said, "Go and sit down."

At dinner time when the boys went out of school, a man sitting in a bus travelling along the main road looked at his paper. He turned and asked the man next to him, "Do you think they'll get him?"

"Oh, yes," said the other man, and wrapped his coat tight around his overgrown belly, pushed his bloated hands into his fur lined gloves. "It's a cert. Where can he go?"

"He might have friends," said the man with the paper, and as he looked out of the window, he could see a little boy running along the road, a crowd of others chasing him and firing stones. He watched them, while the man beside him said, "Boys will be boys, eh?"

They had stopped firing stones when Brian reached his own street. Crowds of people were walking past their door and he went up the stairs quickly, hoping to find Christy hiding in their room, and his mother no longer crying.

But there was no sign of him in the room. His mother was lying in bed, her face turned to the wall, his two sisters sat staring into the fire.

"Is it true?" he asked the eldest; but she didn't hear; her face looked as though she wouldn't ever talk again. He went to the window, and looked out at the people walking along the street. Two women were pointing up to the window he looked from, and afraid that they would see him, he turned around to see his sister cutting at the loaf.

"Here," she said, as she handed him the bread and the cup of tea, "eat that and get back to school. We don't want you around."

"But Christy?" he said, and heard his mother sobbing into the pillow. He looked at the holy picture over the bed and stopped eating for a second, while he said a prayer.

"Go on," said his elder sister, "back to school."

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He walked down the stairs and instead of going out into the street, went down the next flight from the hall and into the yard. A lot of washing hung on the lines; but their line was empty, except for three clothes pegs that had been left in the middle of it. And as he stared at them, he thought they looked like three dead birds.

"School . . . come on . . ." and he heard his younger sister's voice, "that's why Christy . . ." but she didn't finish what she was going to say. Brian walked towards her, and her hand touched his head.

"Be a good boy and say a prayer for him, won't you, Brian?"  
She slipped a penny into his cold hand.

Afraid to go into any of the shops for fear that they'd start talking about his brother, he went to school, the penny a dead and forgotten thing in his unhappy pocket.

At school, it was the same again, everyone talking, but he no longer tried to listen to them. He sat in his desk waiting for the teacher to shout at him. But the teacher never even looked in his direction. Then one kid whispered, "Look, it's beginning to snow."

He looked through the window. The snowflakes were wandering like lost thoughts through the air: and when the lights were lit, the sky outside was like soapy water and the snow came soft as suds against the window panes.

The streets at hometime were white, like after confession the soul is pure and ready to receive the body of Christ. Then he heard people talking, each one who passed would call out to someone they knew, "They've got him."

The snow fell over their words, and another voice would rise out of the flying snow, "They caught him."

At the corner of the street where the buses stopped, a newsboy held up a paper.

### CASEY CAPTURED. MAN HUNT OVER.

The black letters stood out like sins on the pure white paper.

He stood staring at the snow. A crowd of kids from school passed, then stopped and he heard their whisperings. One of them came up to him and held open a bag of sweets. He

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didn't see them as anything he wanted.

"Won't you play at snowballs with us?" asked another kid. He tried to smile back to their faces and failed. He knew he would never again see them as children, never again believe in their games.

"It's too late," he said, "I must go home."

And he walked away, no longer a child, for he had grown into a lonely human being, seeing the snow falling on the road before him, while behind him, it fell just as quietly on the group of boys who stood staring after him, unable to say what they each felt.



## JOHN HEWITT



### Aranmore

The small boy drove the shaggy ass  
out of the yard along the track  
rutted between two drystone walls,  
to fetch more turf to top the stack.  
Barefoot he tripped behind its tail,  
too shy to lag and stride with us;  
an older lad would match our pace  
and find some topic to discuss.  
He swung his switch, a salley rod,  
his bleached head glinting in the sun,  
but only flicked his ragged thighs  
and pattered nonchalantly on.

We spoke no word. The boy, the ass,  
the rutted path across the bare  
unprofitable mountainside  
were native to this Druid air.  
But as we followed, rag and patch,  
the string that braced the splintered creel,  
the bare, rubbed flank, the hooves unshod  
growing awry and down-at-heel,  
so woke our pity, I pronounced  
a bitter sentence to condemn  
the land that bears such boys and beasts  
to starve the beauty out of them.

The small boy heard—not quite my words  
but rather say—my angry tone;  
a bright blush warmed his sunburnt neck;  
he struck a sharp and jolting bone,  
and drove the ass with prod and cry

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clean off the track and out of sight,  
although the deep turf trenches lay  
clearly ahead there on the right;  
misjudging my intent, and sure  
that we were proud and critical.  
Your father's beast is very dear  
if you are poor, if you are small . . . .

# MICHAEL LUCEY



## Sweets

A FEW were sucking already. I sucked too as we waited for the master. Kidsie turned from the table, puzzled. She pointed the ruler at me with, "How dare you eat sweets in class!"

"I'm not, miss."

"Then what, may I ask, are you eating?"

"Nothin', miss."

"Hym," she smirked and came over. "You could at least tell a lie less bare-faced."

I was tongue-tied.

"Stick out your tongue." I obeyed. "Nothing on it. You swallowed the sweet!"

"No, miss."

"No? Do you take me for a fool?"

I wanted to explain but felt something dry blocking my throat. I swallowed hard.

"Hym. Tell me you've swallowed nothing now."

"No, miss."

"You have."

"I haven't."

She stared hard. I looked down, desperately wanting to explain and not knowing how; but looked back again, determined to stare her out of countenance.

But she pounced on Patsy with, "You were sucking!"

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Patsy sat like a cucumber. "Yes, miss."

"My God, the truth! Put it on the desk."

"What, miss?"

"The sweet."

"I wasn't suckin' a sweet."

"What then?"

"Nothin', miss."

Slapping her own hand in quick jerks with the ruler, she walked back to the table. When she turned, her eyes were moist.

She said, "Catechism. Keep your books closed and we'll run through it from the beginning. Mary, who made the world?"

The partition door flew open and in came the master.

Eyes at the desk turned to him longingly. Voices rose from the other side of the partition. The master returned to the open door and cried, "Silence!" then slammed the door and passed the table to face us.

"Better behaved than my people as big as they are, Miss Noonan," he said, without looking over at her.

She admitted, "At times."

"Well," to us, putting a hand in his right coat pocket, "were we all at chapel last night?"

A few looked away.

"Hands up those who were."

Over a dozen hands rose. Patsy, not content with shooting his so high that the arm strained in its socket, clicked his fingers as well. I whispered, as the master went round to question the absentees, "You're in for it really now, Patsy."

"Shut up. I was there."

"But you weren't."

"Shut up, anyway."

We listened to Sheila O'Hea bleating she had to mind the house and the master asking if the house would have run away; Sean Dunn saying the clock had stopped and being asked if he had ears for bells; Dick Mahoney whispering he

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had to feed the pigs and being told that the pigs could have waited one hour.

The master returned to face the class. Taking the hand from his right coat pocket he produced a white paper bag. He transferred it to his left hand and went from desk to desk, putting a sweet before everyone except the three with the excuses.

"Toffees," Patsy whispered. "I must get three of them."

"Impossible," said I. "How can you tell what the priest said when you weren't even there?"

No one within living memory had ever got three sweets. Two, for some idea of what was said, was the most.

We were all sucking our single sweets. All except Patsy. His lay, still wrapped in its gelatine paper, under his nose.

"Patsy," said the master, "what part of the chapel were you in?"

"The organ gallery, sir."

"What priest said it?"

"Father Dea."

"Forgive me for doubting you." The master was sincere. "Now, who can tell me what the sermon was about?"

A dead silence.

"Come now. None of you is deaf; and you all can't have such terrible memories." He took two toffees from the bag.

Their paper flashed in the sunbeam. "Mary?"

"Sir," she whispered, "'twas about heaven."

"A poor effort." His eyes travelled to me.

I ventured, "An' earth, sir."

"Patsy?"

Patsy sat up straight. "He preached, sir, on the General Judgment."

"Good! And what did he say?"

"He said we'll all be judged one by one as we die, an' sent to heaven, hell, or purgatory. But on the Last Day there'll be no more purgatory, only heaven or hell. An' everyone will be judged all over again."

"Why? Still in your own words, now."

"So that people will be seen by everyone as they really are."

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"Good!" The master, delighted, put the two toffees before Patsy. I was dumbfounded. As the master left I whispered, "Who told yeh?"

"Father Dea. He met me yesterday an' explained, asking me to come an' hear him preach it."

Only then I noticed Mary McCarthy with another toffee. Looking down, I saw one under my nose. I unwrapped it, pocketing the paper, and popped it into my mouth. The sucking noise from Mary McCarthy and me was louder than that from the others, whose toffees were now nearly gone. But Patsy had only just unwrapped his three toffees. He gathered them in one fist and put them on his tongue.

Kidsie came over, eyeing him. She carried a Catechism.

"Patsy," she asked, quietly, "why did God make the world?" He stopped sucking and became rigid.

A shocked murmur travelled round the class. "Miss! Miss!" begged the three absentees with their hands up. Sean Dunn's fingers were clicking.

"Patsy, why did God make the world?"

"For--eh. . . ."

A fit of coughing seized him. It subsided and left him staring, open-mouthed, at the mistress.

He had swallowed his three sweets.



# LIAM O'FLAHERTY



## The Parting

MICHAEL JOYCE stood beside his mother, against the gable end of the storehouse, down by the head of the pier where the steamer from the mainland lay moored. He was about to leave his native island for the first time, in order to enter the diocesan seminary and study for the priesthood.

Dressed in a new suit of blue serge, with a fawn-coloured raincoat slung across his right shoulder, he looked alert and very much at ease, as if the imminent parting were of no concern to him. Although barely thirteen, he already had a finely proportioned body. He was big and strong for his age. He stood with the assurance of a full grown man in the prime of condition, balanced lightly on the balls of his feet, with his head thrown back haughtily. His wild blue eyes looked cold and very proud, as they glanced hither and thither. His thin lips were set firmly.

Yet this brave exterior was but a mask to hide the terrible agony he suffered. Indeed, all his strength and pride were necessary to hold back the bitter tears that kept welling up into his throat. He wanted terribly to throw himself on his mother's bosom and weep aloud, as he had so often done in infancy. He longed to feel her loving arms about him, protecting him from the frightening world that was about to make him prisoner. He craved for her soothing words of tenderness, that had until now softened all his woes by their magic power.

Alas! the more he suffered and wanted to surrender, the more his pride of race forced him to remain hard and relentless. Now and again, when the inner struggle almost reached the limit of his endurance and the skin began to contract below his eyes, or about the corners of his mouth, he just gave his head a sudden upward jerk and drew in a deep breath. That helped him to regain control.

This struggle had made his senses painfully acute. From

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where he stood he could distinctly hear the fireman put coal in the steamer's furnace for the journey back to the mainland. The rasping scound of the shovel against the steel plates of the stoke-hold deck caused his nostrils to twitch. It was like drawing his finger nails over a smooth stone. On the fore-castle head, they were using the donkey engine to hoist cattle on board. Every time the little engine hissed and shot out a jet of steam, as it was about to lift another beast, he had to grit his teeth. The rattle of the chain unfolding from the winch, to lower the hoisted animals into the hold, made him feel that enormous rocks were falling down upon his head.

Worst of all was the smell of burning coal. He belonged to the most remote hamlet on the island, nine miles to the west. His people lived there in primitive simplicity, as their ancestors had lived for thousands of years, using turf and cow dung for fuel. Coal was unknown to them. So that its acrid smell gave him a slight feeling of nausea.

His mother turned towards him, with her head concealed within the hood of her black shawl. She was a tall slender woman of very dignified carriage, wearing a handsome red frieze skirt that had two deep flounces of black velvet.

"Listen to me, darling," she whispered. "Do you remember what I told you about your feet?"

"What's that, mother?" Michael said without looking at her.

He spoke to her gruffly, in spite of his love for her. Indeed, it was the intensity of his love that forced him to be gruff and almost brutal when he spoke to her. If he allowed any tenderness to creep into his voice, it would mean the collapse of his resistance.

"You must take great care not to get them wet," she insisted, raising her voice a little and bending close to him. "Or if you do happen to get them wet, no matter where you are, you must run and change your socks at once. Promise me that now."

"All right, mother," he said.

"Oh! Darling," she said, "I'll suffer every night from now until you come back to me on holidays, for fear you might forget about your feet. You are so headstrong and you catch cold so easily. Last spring, you . . ."

"Look, mother," Michael interrupted. "Here's our bullock coming down now. He looks wonderful."

His mother pushed her shawl back from her head to look

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at the bullock. Although she was over fifty, her long pale face was still beautiful. Her hair was very fair. Her eyes were golden.

"Ah! There's our little one, sure enough," she said. "The poor little creature! Ah! God help him! The life is frightened out of him."

"He's not little at all," Michael said indignantly. "He's one of the best bullocks on the island this year. He nearly took the sway at the fair to-day."

"Ah! the poor little one!" his mother said. "He'll always be little to me, no matter how big he has grown. I'll always remember him as a little calf. Ah! God help him! He doesn't know where he is. He's mad with the fright."

The bullock looked a splendid animal. His hide was a deep red colour except for a little white star at the centre of his forehead. His hair was long and curly, of a fine rich texture. He was very fat. He was already sold and the jobber's brand was clearly visible on his massive haunch, as he came charging down the pier. He rushed hither and thither, snorting and tossing foam from his jaws, as he tried to escape from the narrowing circle of young men that shouted and tried to grapple with him. Again and again he swung his powerful head in order to dislodge the hands of some fellow that had managed to grip his horns.

Then Martin Joyce, Michael's eldest brother, got a firm hold that the bullock was unable to dislodge. He was a powerfully built man of twenty-six, wearing grey frieze trousers and a thick blue woollen sweater. Gripping the horns fiercely in his strong hands, he began to turn the beast's head sideways and to bear down on it with all his strength, while his hob-nailed boots slithered over the cobble-stones. Man and beast only came to a halt when they were within a yard of the pier's edge. There the bullock made a supreme effort to free himself. He uttered a wild bellow, tossed his head and reared on his hind legs. Martin was carried off the ground, but he maintained his grip on the horns. When he and the bullock came down again, he deftly shifted his right hand from the horn to the beast's nostrils, into which he thrust his thumb and fore-finger. That tamed the bullock. He offered no further resistance. He stood stock still and allowed his head to be twisted right round, until his foaming snout was upturned. Other men then gripped him by the tail and crowded in upon him from all sides.

"Get the slings around him," Martin said to his father.

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Bartly Joyce was a tall, grey-haired man of sixty, with a very red face. He looked half crazy just now, since he was a very neurotic fellow and any excitement caused him to become hysterical. He was barely able to arrange the slings around the bullock's belly, one at either end, because of his agitation. Another man fixed a long halter to the beast's horns. Then Bartly signalled to the mate on the steamer's bridge.

"Lower away there," the mate yelled to the man at the winch.

Michael shuddered as the unfolding chain began to rattle. He felt an overwhelming pity for the pinioned animal, whose fate he instinctively felt to be somewhat akin to his own. They were both being taken away from their native island to serve the ambition of others, the bullock to be eaten and the boy to become a priest.

"Ah! The poor little creature!" Mrs. Joyce said with tears in her eyes, as she watched the bullock. "Look at him standing there and he half dead with fright. The poor dumb creature! How he must be suffering!"

Michael was also very near to tears as he saw his father cross the slings over the animal's back and put the iron hook of the hoist through the loop. He re-called how he had taught the beast to drink milk out of a pail, when it was being weaned from its mother's teats. He used to let it suck his fingers, after having dipped them in the milk. Then he gradually drew the snout down into the pail and kept it there, until the calf finally began to drink the milk of its own accord.

At this moment, more than two years later, the boy vividly remembered the queer warm pressure of the calf's gums.

"Hoist away there," the mate shouted.

The engine hissed and shot out steam. The chain began to rattle once more as it rolled back on to the winch. The bullock rose into the air, with his belly forced out to a sharp point on either side by the pressure of the slings. He kept flaying the air with his forelegs and bellowing mightily.

"Get out of my way," Bartly Joyce shouted as he ran forward to the edge of the pier, holding the guide rope that was attached to the beast's horns. "Give me room, I say. God blast ye, give me room."

The excitable fellow struck at those on either side of him with his elbows. It was a simple matter to keep the bullock's

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head turned towards the pier and to manoeuvre the animal into the correct position above the open mouth of the hold. Yet Bartly made a botch of his task. He slipped on the cobble stones, fell down on his buttocks and lost the rope. The bullock was carried far over to port and then forward towards the port railing of the passenger deck. There was a wild shout as the animal almost crashed against the iron railing. At the very last moment, the hoist swung back again towards the pier and Martin succeeded in getting hold of the rope. He quickly manoeuvred the bullock into position.

"Lower away now," the mate yelled.

Bartly had got to his feet in the meantime. He tried to take the rope from Martin as the animal was being lowered gently into the hold.

"Keep back there," Martin said.

"Give me that rope," said Bartly. "Let me handle him."

Martin swore and pushed his father roughly with his shoulder. Bartly again lost his footing on the slippery cobblestones. He fell down flat on his buttocks. There was a roar of laughter from those present.

"There he is again," Mrs. Joyce said indignantly, as she blushed with shame of her husband, "making a show of himself."

Michael bitterly resented the laughter. He particularly resented the laughter of some tourists and cattle jobbers, who were watching the scene from the passenger deck of the steamer. He felt they were laughing in a different way from the islanders. Indeed, he felt that these "foreigners" looked upon all islanders as savages, whose conduct must always be ludicrous. At the seminary, other "foreigners" would laugh at everything he himself did and said, because of his humble origin.

"I don't see how he's making a show of himself," he said angrily to his mother. "He just fell down. He's not used to wearing boots. That was why he fell. Why don't you side with him, instead of siding with other people?"

"Hush! Little treasure!" his mother said in a forlorn tone. "Don't say bitter things to me, my little pulse, at the very moment you are going to leave me."

A wave of remorse overwhelmed the boy for having given pain to his mother. This time he would undoubtedly have burst into tears if his brother had not approached. Horror of letting Martin see him cry enabled him to regain his self control.

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" You'll have a fine trip," Martin said in a solemn and casual tone, as if he were addressing a grown up man, who was a perfect stranger to him.

" It should be a fine trip all right," Michael answered in the same tone, without looking at his brother. " The sea is dead calm."

" Whatever wind there is will be with you," Martin said, "all the way!"

" We ought to make it in three hours," Michael said.

" With God's help," Martin said, " you should make it easily in that time."

Mrs. Joyce leaned towards Martin and whispered to him.

" You shouldn't have shouldered your father like that," she said in a reproving though gentle tone. " Shame on you, treasure, for knocking him down. You made a show of him, darling one, right in front of the whole island. Shame on you, I say."

Martin turned swiftly towards her. His bronzed face was dark with anger. He looked very strong and virile in his thick blue sweater and grey frieze trousers, that were fouled by the dung of animals he had seized. One of the beasts had cut his right cheek with the sharp point of a horn. A large patch of clotted blood covered the whole centre of the cheek.

" Why didn't he keep out of the way?" he cried roughly. " He's always interfering and making a mess of things."

He would get married in the following spring and take command of the homestead. He was already inclined to behave like a master and to be intolerant of his father.

" You shouldn't have shouldered him all the same, treasure of my heart," his mother said. " It wasn't a nice thing to do in front of the neighbours."

" I tell you he wouldn't get out of my way," Martin said.

" There were strangers looking on as well," said Mrs. Joyce. " It was a scandalous thing you did, little one."

" He might have killed the bullock and myself with his fooling," said Martin. " He doesn't know what he's doing when he has the least drop taken. He gets crazy."

Michael felt very hostile towards his brother, not only for having made his father a laughing stock, but also for a far more personal reason. The boy did not fully understand his other reason. He just felt instinctively that he was chiefly being

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made a priest, in order that he might later help to rear and educate the children that Martin would beget. He now resented the barren destiny that had been planned for him, cut off from the joys of mating and from communion with the earth as a toiler.

His father came over and glanced with hatred at Martin.

"Huh! You blackguard!" he said to his oldest son. "You are very free with your shouldering."

Martin shook hands casually with Michael and then walked away.

"That's enough now, Bartly," Mrs. Joyce said. "There's no harm done. Forget about it. It was only an accident."

Bartly's wild eyes became tender as he turned towards Michael. Yet he spoke to the boy gravely and without emotion, as to a stranger.

"You'll have a good crossing," he said.

"We should," said Michael. "The sea is calm."

"The wind is with you, too," the father said.

Then he took a paper bag out of his jacket pocket and handed it shyly to the boy. Michael looked into the bag. It contained yellow sticks of candy known as "Peggy's Leg." The boy swallowed his breath and wanted to say something tender to his father. Yet his training forbade him to do so.

"May God spare your health," he said solemnly.

The father also wanted to put his arm about his boy's shoulders and say something tender. The rigid discipline of his life prevented him.

"Well! Here you all are," cried a flashily dressed young woman, who pushed her way through the crowd at that moment. "I've been looking all over the place for you. Land's sake! This pier is more crowded than Broadway right now."

She was Barbara Joyce, the oldest surviving daughter of the family. She had been thirteen years in America and was now home on holiday. Although only thirty-two, her once beautiful face had become worn and faded from hard work. She still had a good figure, which a tight red dress showed off to good advantage. A little round hat, surmounted by brightly coloured artificial flowers, was perched jauntily on the side of her head. Her boisterous gaiety was in striking contrast with

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the grave dignity of the other islanders.

"Hello! Mickey," she cried, tapping her young brother jocularly on the chin with her knuckles. "Keep smiling, sonny boy. Don't let it get you. Everybody feels pretty homesick leaving home first time. I know how I felt myself. It was pretty terrible, but I soon got over it. So will you. Just keep that chin up, sonny boy."

All the surviving children of the family were in America, except Martin and Michael. It was money subscribed by the children in exile and brought home by Barbara that paid Michael's way to the seminary.

Michael loved Barbara very much, because of her gaiety and tenderness. Yet he now felt ashamed of the attention she attracted by her loud voice and her somewhat rowdy manner. So he blushed and looked at the ground.

"Hello! Mary Lydon," cried Barbara, as she rushed away to greet another woman. "You look lovely in that new dress. How is your mother? Hello! Bridget. Hello! Johnny Breasail. Land's sake! The whole island is here to-day."

The steamer whistle blew suddenly. Michael almost jumped off the ground with fright. The horse reared and whinnied on a shrill note. Mrs. Joyce burst into tears.

"It's time to get on board," Bartly shouted hysterically.

He picked up Michael's suitcase and added:

"Come on now. She'll be going any minute."

Mrs. Joyce threw her arms about her son and began to kiss him frantically all over his face.

"Oh! My little darling!" she muttered as she kissed him. "My pulse! My lovely little treasure!"

"That's enough now, woman," Bartly said to her tenderly after a little while. "He has to go on board."

He gently disengaged her arms and led Michael towards the gangway. She hid her face in her shawl and continued to weep without restraint. A number of relatives and neighbours pressed forward to shake hands with the boy.

"Make way there," Bartly shouted at these people. "There is very little time now. He must go on board."

Michael felt completely bewildered by the noise as he followed his father on board. Bartly put down the suitcase.

shook hands hurriedly with his son and went ashore again. Barbara came on board. She was going with Michael as far as the seminary. She stood for a little while beside him at the rails, talking in a loud voice to those on the pier. Then she joined a group of cattle jobbers, with whom she entered into a lively conversation. The gangway was pulled ashore. A bell rang on the bridge. The engines began to turn. The mooring ropes were cast loose. The steamer drew away. People began to shout goodbye and to wave handkerchiefs.

The boy was still bewildered as he stood by the rails. Like the poor beasts down in the dark hold, the strangeness of his new environment had made his senses numb. Then the steamer made a wide circuit and headed towards the open sea, with her port bow to the pier. He hurried across to the other side of the deck. The pier was now some distance away. Only a few people stood watching the steamer. His parents stood alone, side by side, down at the very brink. The steamer gathered speed as it passed them. They were still near enough, as he passed, for him to see the look of anguish on his mother's face.

Then his mind suddenly cleared and pain came to him again with awful bitterness, as he listened to his sister's laughter and watched his parents stand motionless by the brink of the pier wall, beyond the ever widening white lane that the ship left on the surface of the blue water.

His bitterness was terrible because his young heart knew that dark vows would make this parting final, forever and forever.



## L. A. G. STRONG



### The Mysteries

When I was young I'd little sense,  
I scribbled on my father's fence.  
He cursed me coldly for a lout  
And made me rub the writing out.

When I was young I'd little pride,  
And that's a fault the girls deride.  
They keep you waiting, set you tasks,  
And give no kiss to him who asks.

Then, when I'd five and twenty years  
Life dug my ribs and eased my fears.  
The girls began to change their note,  
And people kept the things I wrote.

But now that I am young no more,  
With newer grief my heart is sore.  
License to love and leave to kiss  
Have brought me to the precipice.

Whether I balance there or fall,  
And what I've done to earn it all,  
Whether I'm better off, or worse,  
Deserving either kiss or curse—

By putting questions such as these  
I camouflage the mysteries,  
And reckon bravely in a row  
The things I am afraid to know.

# PATRICIA HUTCHINS



## The Boathouse

WHEN John got back to the boat-house the girl had gone. The electric fire was on, and the light, making the living-room more empty by the bland continuance of their function. Some shells and a little sand were on the table. These she had picked up during their walk along the beach and turned over and over as they talked, scooping the grains into ridges and patterns with her fingers. Two cups, not long ago holding hot, cream covered coffee, now seemed cigarette-dusty, meaningless.

John looked into the bedroom, although he knew that her coat was no longer there, leaving no dent on the cover where it had stretched like a recumbent body; the brown coat which seemed so alive that afternoon in the strong east wind. Its loose folds, blowing her sail-like against him, had merged with his own, so that pushing forward against the wind's persistent forcefulness, their movements had been shared. He began to go over the time spent with her; to learn its shape and contour.

About five the girl appeared at the window of the converted boat-house, a holiday place now used as lodging by two engineers building a bridge on the river. At this point the fresh water ran into the sea through a small estuary. At high tide the water rose almost to the level of the boat-house, a low wall holding back the waves on stormy days. At all times sea-birds passed, rising high and curving down again on their way up the river or towards the open.

John was working at a table untidy with books and papers and, hearing a tap on the window, looked up to see the outline of a girl standing there; the condensation on the glass made her seem unreal. Leaning over to open the window, the cold air on his face and her laugh brought back the normal again.

"I had no idea anyone lived here," she said. "I thought

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I might find an old boatman mending nets."

"It is rather late in the year."

"Well. . ." She peered inside. "At least a few oars and lobster pots in the rafters; why there isn't even the smell of old paint, only paraffin oil and bacon frying!"

"A friend and I are here—" John began, then stopped, for she was looking over the water, not listening.

"Oh," switching herself on again. "Is he here?"

"No, very rarely now."

"I was only going to ask the way," she said more directly. "Not personal questions."

"I'm sorry." - He felt at fault. "Where?"

"There. . ." she pointed southward. "Can one be sure of getting back when the tide's coming in?"

"Yes. . ." he drew it out, the word, while making up his mind on another issue.

"Can I come and show you?" He risked a snub. "There is a place—it's a way of getting round the stream which you mightn't . . ."

Again she turned, hand on the wall, interested in the young, gray-eared gulls that pitched up and down in little sharp, clean-edged movements over shallow water. The side of her face told him nothing but the smooth, pearl-beautiful curve of head and cheek. When she glanced at him he could not decide if she were good-looking or not; her face would not allow one to consider details properly—whether the nose was too large or mouth too wide, eyes set rightly. Movement and expression continually changed, guarding against enquiry.

Her hands were different. Relaxed, long-fingered, they gave away all that was consciously concealed, or so it seemed to John, in a moment when many things are known but cannot be sorted out.

"I will be taking you from this?"

She pointed to the papers. There was no question of their being strangers. They might have been people staying in the same house.

\* \* \*

Round the corner of the estuary the east wind rushed again;

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their bodies from across the long sands and flat land bordering them for miles. The sea had left all colours of gray and brown wetness, and higher up, the ridges of sea-weed contained thousands of razor-shells which cracked like thin bones under their feet.

"This might be anywhere in the world," she said. "Norfolk, Ireland, or the sands at Lindisfarne."

"Yes, it is all known, somehow." John answered. "Even you coming here." He noticed how the wind took the ends of the long brown coat, loose from the shoulders, throwing them here and there, and caught her hair, parting it arbitrarily as pictures in a gallery are sometimes hung on hinged screens. A mixture of dark and auburn, as though much in the sun, at moments the girl pushed small pieces back from her face as they struggled forward, and impatient, shook her head as a spaniel frees its ears.

Now and then she stopped with an "Ah . . ." of acquisitiveness, taking up a pink-eared shell, a flat scallop with mauve stains on its ridged whiteness, a stone streaked with marble or a tide-polished piece of stick. These she held for a while, like a child examining their quality, and then let fall again.

John could not remember how they talked, not one fact she had told. They moved into that relation of ideas and emotion which usually occurs when a number of sympathy tests have been made between people. Occasionally she would interrupt, letting the surroundings break in and combine with their thoughts.

"Look at those ridges in the sand, where each wave has gone out, like rings on a tree—the same thing, a measurement of time," she said. They stood beside the stream which cut the shore in two, at a spot where the banks curved to meet each other, the water then spreading fan-wide into thin, bright shallows with pebbles showing through them. John watched her make a run and jump over, triumphant on the other side.

"Those black-backed gulls," she said another moment. "They are so heavy, let's watch them take off; as a plane does into the wind . . ." From their resting position, smooth bodies like cowry shells, the herring gulls rose carelessly, to settle further on. Sand-pipers, their legs like the red stems of sycamore leaves, carried their thin cry here and there among the pools and streams.

The sky was eschscholtzia colour now, texture and thinness of its yellow flower. A light-house, beyond the flounces of white where the sea ended the sands, turned on a speck of

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red for a second and disappeared again. Two workmen from a quarry passed on the black silhouettes of their bicycles. Pushed now by the wind, hurrying in front of them, John and the girl returned to the boat-house.

While she tidied her hair before his mirror, John made coffee with the efficiency of the man who looks after himself. Over it they discussed places seen, books read. For some reason other people were not mentioned. John gathered enough to know that she was only passing through that part of the country, visiting friends.

"Where——" he was about to ask when she opened the window.

"Oh!" she sniffed. "The smell of your old seaweed—yet curiously enough I half like it."

The moon was coming up now, and the estuary, reflecting its first brightness, was dark here and there with water, smooth where the sand was like a wet skin. Some late going crows clacked to each other and passed overhead with a sound suggesting the black moiré of their wings.

John dared not stand near her. Aware of himself as a filament through which power seemed to pass, his body seemed too slight to hold its intensity. Yet this tension between them must be kept taut; a bridge and yet a frontier. Both wanted it so.

"I often watch the fresh water coming down here," he said, "and just merging into the tide. Then comes a moment when the sea moves up the river with vigour and purpose, and what they call 'the bride veil' of foam is seen a long way inland."

"Yes," she said very slowly, "I have seen it, but did not know the name."

Communication between them was deeper and wider than speaking could hold. They watched the moon, pale as a seed-pod of honesty, rise clear of the clouds, and the sea become a pavement on which the unseen shower of light danced back upon itself.

"I'll get the car and drive you back," John said at last. "Your friends will wonder . . ."

When he returned she had gone. "To-morrow," he thought, carefully scooping the sand and shells on the table into the flat of his hand, "to-morrow I will ask her name."

## SEAMUS DE FAOITE



### Kate's Grandchild

IT was my mother who told me, long after, the way it was with old Kate Flahive when the last of her five children had left the laneway. Her husband had been a woodman in a local estate, until he met his death under a crossgrained tree. In my time all that remained of Pat Flahive were his nailed boots, worn thongless by Kate herself. Kate did well for the children, carrying each to the last school year by scrubbing floors the years round and making the most of ha'pence. Age found her bones and her eyes ahead of time, her eyes in particular. The children were a battle to control, it seems, especially the two girls with their handsome prancing bodies and hot blood. One after another they left the lane and the country and ever after gave Kate or the neighbours no reason to believe that they looked back.

The postman never stopped at Kate's door and yet it took many days to cure her of waiting in the doorway during post times.

'That's a grand morning, Mrs. Flahive.'

'A grand morning, thank God, that will make a brave day,' Kate would agree with the postman.

Then she would pull the tails of her three-cornered shawl tighter into her armpits and lean farther over the halfdoor, her mouth wearing away a gumdrop for her asthma. Later in the day she would be there again.

'That's a great day now, Mrs Flahive.'

'A great day, thank God, that will bring a good night too.'

The postman's footsteps would have gone beyond her hearing and his shape would have faded in her failing sight before

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she turned in for the dim kitchen. The fire would guide her to the hearth seat—a cut from the bole of a long gone tree—where flame light would flow over her face, like sunny water over an old porous stone. Then her ringed hand would reach towards the cradle of her illegitimate grandchild.

Because she was a next door neighbour and trusted by Kate, my mother was asked to stand as godmother of the lad. The parish clerk was asked in the baptistry to be godfather since he would know anyhow.

'What do you want the boy to be called, Mrs. Flahive?' the priest asked.

'Making you no short answer, Father,' Kate answered. 'you can call him the day of the week for all I care.'

'To-day is the Feast of Saint Anthony,' the priest said.  
'How about the name Anthony?'

So Anthony he was named during that hour stolen from public notice for the christening.

For his first seven months of life Anthony was no more to Kate than a presence with her in the quiet house. Twice a day she waited for the postman and after he had passed she would brood over the memory of her scattered children only remembering Anthony through remembering them. It was easy to disremember the sort of child he was, with hardly more sound or stir from him than from the flat-faced china dogs on the dresser or the stopped three cornered clock on its bracket on the hob. In common with the dogs and the clock and the picture of Our Lady on the back wall and every piece and scrap of ornament or usefulness in the place, the child was visited by the soft white ash flakes that drifted from the fire when Kate used the bellows on it.

My mother was able to tell me all this because as often as not she was there in the kitchen, making a meal of milk for Anthony or changing his child-clothes. It was twenty years since Kate had done for her own in that way, and what with peering and poking in the halflight she was lost for the sure, quick-fingered touch it called for. My mother understood for this and Kate was grateful.

'You're very good, Lena child,' Kate would tell her.

'Good how-are-you, woman,' my mother would say, making light of it.

'You have your own care indeed,' Kate would insist.

'So my hands are in practice, Kate.'

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'A whisper, Lena. What sort of a child is it to look at?'

'A lovely child, Kate, with a nice long set of limbs, blue eyes, and a sprinkle of fair, silky hair that haven't to ask the sun for the gloss on it. Far and away a nicer child than the black lad I have next door.'

I was the black lad. I am that to-day.

'Ah, now you're only saying, Lena. Sure I know what you are like yourself and what your boy's father is like. But my girl who left that child with me was no fair-haired.'

'I have left more milk in the saucepan, ready to your hand,' my mother would say, or something like it, to take Kate away from herself. 'The bottle will be beside him in the cradle after he is finished what I gave him now. Anyhow I'll run out again when I have my own lad settled.'

'A whisper, child. Isn't it queer for a baby to be as quiet as that for so long? Night or day time he do hardly give a stir or a sound. Now and again, when I remember, I do put my ear down to his mouth till I hear him breathing. For though I don't want him, I don't want without him through fault of mine.'

Now by this time every mother and grandmother in the lane was concerned about Anthony: and about Kate herself. Every hand's turn for their own reminded them of the child who was hidden in the half-light near Kate. No one of them was more put out than my mother, because she feit that her place in Kate's confidence put the brunt of the blame on her shoulders. No other woman in the lane could as much as talk to Kate about Anthony, until such time as Kate owned to his existence among them. They talked and plotted among themselves and gathered their ripest wisdom for my mother, who was expected to use it at the right times between Kate and the child. But Kate had a will and a way of her own. She even shortened the scope of my mother's helpfulness, as much as she could manage. In the matter of shopping for Anthony, for instance, my mother could have done the needful when she was buying for me: but Kate would not hear of it. The rule was, when my mother could spare the time to sit with Anthony, Kate would cowf herself in a street shawl that breathed of smoke and paraffin. Huddled under it, to save her worn eyes from daylight, she eased one loose boot before the other towards lane's end and the shops.

Having to buy the extra milk was an embarrassment for her, Johnny Downey the huckster told me.

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'A half-pint of milk,' she would say, stealing the old crock out from under her shawl.

She would wait until the milk was ladled into the crock. Then she would take it into her hands and peer into it, the bridge of her smudged nose against the earthenware.

'Is the milk going scarce?' she would ask.

'No, mam,' Johnny would tell her.

'Will it be scarce to-morrow, do you think?'

'No, mam.'

'But you never know all the same?' would come from her: near to pleading, peering anxiously in the direction of his face.

'Not a chance this time of year, mam.'

'Oh,' she would say, and go two steps, come two steps, go and come again.

'If I got a pint more, would it be sour to-morrow for baking?' she would ask this time, the old face hanging loose as she bent her head to peer once more.

'It would indeed, mam,' Johnny would say, glad to agree with her in something.

'Then give me the pint, if you please,' she would tell him, holding the crock out in a quake of eagerness.

When Anthony was seven months old and still a stranger to daylight and sky the women of the lane were beside themselves. During their to and fro going past Kate's door their footsteps got slower on the cobble stones, as they plucked for the courage to walk in and breast whatever way Kate would take them. My mother was very upset but she hid her feeling with a show of cheerfulness and bided her time. Kate carried on taking each day as a day in itself. The child went on being untroublesome, as if his scrap of young life, when it stirred, touched Kate's old life in the quiet place and so had learned to stir but little. Now and then he gave a mild complaint because of wind pain or loneliness. What happened on those rare occasions, when my mother was not there, no one knew; but when they happened in her presence she had to take and calm the child herself, because Kate made no move. During all that more than seven months Kate never touched the baby while my mother was in the kitchen, until one mid-day in the August of that year. My mother was holding Anthony in her arms after he had been fed and freshened with clean clothes. For Kate's benefit she began to cluck to Anthony in the proud mother-hen way that women use to

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make a child feel its importance to the world.

'Wouldn't your granny love to see you now, Anthony pet?' she began.

'Granny,' Kate grunted.

'Clean as a new pin and smiling,' my mother went on.  
'Wouldn't your granny love to see you? Ask her, pet, ask her there in a huddle by the fire.'

'My eyes are as dim as dusk,' Kate grumbled.

'There's a big splash of sunlight over the half door, Anthony,' my mother ran on, 'that is just as if the Lord sent it for your grannie to see it shining on your bright head.'

When Kate held her ground my mother tried another approach.

'Feel the weight of him Kate,' she said.

'My old hands are clumsy,' Kate protested.

Each big hand was on an opposite elbow in her crouch by the hearthlight, their vein-roots high against the skin as if groping after the slow ebb of life through the blood. Kate drew them into her lap and leaned over them.

'Clumsy how-are-you, Kate,' my mother assured her. 'Tis only to feel the weight of him.'

Kate paid no heed.

'Here,' said my mother.

She reached forward with the child and put him against Kate's face. The old body straightened on the hearth seat.

'No,' she said.

'Yes, Kate,' said my mother. 'As a favour for me.'

Kate's heavy hands lifted slowly and gathered the child down against her big, slack bosom.

'Sure I know his weight, Lena,' she said. 'The weight of a cork.'

'Air and light will put weight and strength in him,' said my mother. 'Watch him, will you; looking at the sunlight over the half-door. Ah God love him, take him to the light, Kate, take him to the light.'

Kate lifted an ear towards the doorway. The sounds of childplay in the lane were distant. Near at hand there was nothing to hear. Then she reached up to offer the child to my mother.

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'Here, Lena. Let you take it to the light.'

'In the sunlight a body could see him plain,' my mother remarked.

There was a long pause, but Kate raised herself off the hearth seat and moved slowly towards the sunlight. Except for the grey house shawl on her shoulders Kate was clad in black. In his white and blue wrappings the child lay like a big posy on her breast. The light met them as if the day's brightness was hungry for them. The child's white skin and fair hair met the light halfway and gave a glow back. Kate's crumpled face took it dully and gave no change. The boy's blue eyes beat their lids, like butterflies awakening to wings. Kate's head came between them and the light as she peered an inch above his face. The touch of the sun called his limbs to life. He began to kick and glaum. His legs encircled her neck. His hands caught in her tangled hair. Then in the shadow of her head he gave suddenly the first cry of pleasure in his life.

'Did you hear that, Kate?' my mother called out of the half-dark maw of the kitchen.

Kate moved enough to give a blank back to her eagerness.

'Did you hear that crow of delight?' my mother asked.

Kate gave no answer, but continued to stand there, the old heavy body in a stillness like stupor, half-crouched over the live child.

'Kate,' my mother called.

Kate turned slowly until her eyes found the guide of the hearthlight. The wide black bulk of her returned to the dusk with the child wriggling on her breast.

'Kate, did you hear him?' my mother said with a determined loudness.

'Hear what, child?' asked Kate.

'The cry of delight he gave when he met the sun?'

A moment went by before Kate answered.

'Sometimes my ears are as bad as my eyes,' she answered.

'But you surely saw him in that strong light,' my mother said. 'And what do you think of him?'

'The glare of the sun put a cloud of colour over the splink I have,' Kate told her. 'Here, Lena, put him back in the cradle.'

'You're a dogged old woman,' my mother told her outright.

But Kate's ears were not hearing again.

One good came out of the occurrence. It gave Kate the custom of holding Anthony in the doorway any hours her ears told her were free of footsteps. She stood far enough in from the halfdoor to be hidden from sight at right or left. Facing her across the considerable width of the lane was the white-washed wall of an orchard, owned by a publican with a shop-front in the street beyond the lane archway. The cool green of the apple trees showed above the wall, as thick as thatch. The Friary steeple rose in the background, near enough to show the bell-wheel and the bell. In the brightest days, Kate saw the view as a strip of misty white below a wide, blue mist of sky; and the steeple as a mast looming out of a blue fog. But the child could see it all and feel the sunlight fawning on him. He crowed and crooned, kicked and glaumed over the old heart. The moment Kate heard a footprint on the cobble stones she backed away into the kitchen. The neighbour women tried to catch her off her guard by treading lightly, but it seemed as if Kate could hear their very breathing, because she was always gone. As well as the women and the men, the children came to know about Anthony. But even their barefoot swiftness and its soft sound on the stones failed to get past Kate's sensitive ear range. Young and old were at an end of patience when the night came that brought the whole affair to a head.

My mother remembered the night well because she did a lot of looking at it. It was a Monday night in that September. That Sunday the County football team had won the All-Ireland Final in Dublin and the team were due to arrive in town by train at half-past ten. From the first dust of dusk the whole town were preparing a welcome. Bonfires were lit in the streets, on the outlying hills and in every lane. Our lane was fortunate in that Bill Horan, the blacksmith, had been shoeing wheels all day, because he left a ring of fire for the lane youths to build on when he was done with it. They built on Bill's ring of fire until it was a stack of burning turf, driving red heat and ripe cherry light against the hands and faces of the crowd that gathered to it.

When my mother had got me to sleep she poked her head through the window of the little room to watch the fun. Young and old of the lane made a ring around the fire. Seats had been made with builder's planks on stone hcaps. Bare-necked men were filling jugs and mugs with porter, out of earthenware jars that youngsters brought between them from the pubs beyond the archway. There was singing and dancing and

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courting and laughter. Over it all, my mother said, were stars as big and near as rushlights. The sky was a deeper than day blue from them and so glowing that patches of it showed through the bell-tower of the Friary. The whole length of the lane had mothers looking through bedroom windows, with the capering crowd before them and the quiet breathing of their babies behind. The only house-front that showed a blank was Kate's. My mother went next door to see how she was. It was firelight there too, but smaller and quieter. When Kate used a light at all she used a candle and only to keep her company.

'Ah, there you are!' my mother greeted. "'Tis a wonder you wouldn't give yourself a light, Kate.'

'To light what?' said Kate. 'For what to see?'

She was sitting with her back to the hob. Spittle from the gumdrop stuck her lips together. Each time they came asunder made a noise like a tap dripping.

'Open that door there,' my mother coaxed.

'Wisha, no, child.'

'Ah, do, Kate. There's great life,' said my mother.

Kate chuckled a bit, then went still-quiet.

'My life is behind my eyes, Lena,' she said. 'I do go wandering in it. And I do get lost.'

'How is Anthony?' my mother asked, peering into the cradle to find the child's forehead for her hand.,

'How is your son?' Kate countered.

'As quiet as your grandchild, Kate,' said my mother, edging the words with rebuke.

She left without a word more, hurrying to me, in fear that the lusty singing around the bonfire would wake me. As the train-time of the team drew nearer the crowd thinned gradually. The singing weakened the way a hymn would if the choir went one by one away out of the organ-loft: the quiet the merrymakers left about the fire was as deep as church quiet.

The station was beyond the church, and near the ten-thirty, the train came in a long roar of carriages through the quiet night. Fog-signals laid on the tracks burst in a volley like rifle fire. Cheering rose in gusts and each echo gave a notion of the sky swaying. With that the town's brass band blared in a marching tune. Tune and cheering drifted nearer as the players were driven down the street beyond the archway, towards a dinner reception in the centre of the town. The

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mothers left behind in the lane pulled shawls and coats over their shoulders and ran up the lane and under the archway, to see the procession passing by: my mother among them.

What happened to Kate after they left she told my mother later. Wandering in the life behind her eyes took her so much out of her way that she was lost to the lane since my mother's leaving of her. When she came back the lane was silent beyond the quiet house. The cheering and band playing was distant beyond the closed door and she hardly remarked about them at all.

Then it was that Anthony suddenly screamed. He cried bitterly and screamed again. Kate groped to him and found him with her hands. Rigid with pain, he was crying and screaming when she lifted him out of the cradle. The next thing she knew she was crooning to him and rocking him in her arms, but he gave no heed to her. Her fingers closed over his body. It was like a stick. In a moment she had flung the door and the half door open and was rushing through our hallway with the screaming child, calling 'Lena! Lena!'

When she got no answer she groped back into the lane and pounded with her fists on the door of the neighbour on the other side.

There was no answer again. All the time the child's screams were gathering in vehemence. Kate rushed towards the bonfire and fell forward over one of the plank seats.

'Oh merciful Christ!' she cried.

As she fell she rolled, out of instinct, onto her back. Her always weak breathing all but left her entirely. With a stare of terror in her half-dead eyes, she lay there in a lifeless heap with the screaming, writhing child on her body. Her breath came back again, bringing life with it and she groped back over the plank. She stood there with the child in her arms, her face to the houses.

'Neighbours! Neighbours!' she shouted.

'Neighbours!'

All the while the band was pounding with the rhythm of her heart so that it took her a while to know that it was a band, and then it took her a while to think of the band as a reason for the empty lane. But in the end she did. When she did she began to run towards the glow in the eye of the archway above the dark outline of the crowd standing in it. Breathing in gasps Kate came with the screaming child behind the crowd. But the band was just passing.

'Neighbours! Neighbours!' she cried, but the blare of the

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band tore through the archway like a wind and drowned her cries.

'Neighbours!'

She groped and caught at sleeves and coat-tails but they pulled away, thinking it was someone fighting for a view.

Then the band was beyond the archway, and suddenly they heard her. When they turned, my mother said, they saw a demented old woman that they hardly recognised as Kate at all. Her thin hair hung from her head in wet tails. Her eyes were raw-wet and the folds of her face were wet. One of the hands that held the screaming child was torn on the knuckles and dark blood made tracks to her elbow.

'Neighbours!' she said, with not enough breath to make it a cry.

'Neighbours, neighbours, neighbours,' she kept on saying after my mother had taken Anthony from her.

'Don't worry, Kate, 'tis nothing,' my mother told her.

'Oh, 'tis, 'tis, Lena,' said Kate.

'I'll take him to the chemist,' said my mother.

And she did. Kate dragged the old boots down the lighted street after her, followed by what looked like the entire lane of people, all of them telling her, 'Shah, Kate.'—'Now Kate—Don't worry, Kate.'

'Where's Lena,' Kate kept saying, her hands feeling in front of her.

Bill Horan, the blacksmith, gave her his hand and led her towards the chemist. By the time they got there, the chemist had already dispensed gripe-water to Anthony and already his crying was quieter.

'Now, Kate,' said my mother. 'there is Anthony, as right as rain.'

As Kate took the child the chemist noticed the blood on her arm.

'Let me see that hand, Mrs. Flahive,' he said.

'To-morrow, child, to-morrow.' Kate told him.

'But Mrs. Flahive,' he began.

'To-morrow, child, to-morrow. Can't you see me. Can't you see me. I'm taking my grandchild home. I'm taking my grandchild home.'

Holding Anthony in her arms she pushed the old boots homeward through the lighted street, followed by all the lane of neighbours.

# ROBERT O'DONOGHUE



## Labour

Man, the Plough, the Earth.  
The slope of a hill that is land that is soul;  
And his sweat on it, drenching it, wrenching  
The pith from it, fighting it, loving it, hating  
Its iron heart, breaking its core.

Women, the Plough, the Earth.  
The slope of a hill that is land that is soul;  
And her tears on it, cursing it, hoping  
The life from it, fearing it, serving it, hating  
Its hostile heart, breaking her own.

Wife, Man, the Cruel Earth.  
The slope of a hill that is land that is soul;  
And their life in it, nursing it, wringing  
The growth from it, ploughing it, setting it, hating  
Its cruel heart, losing their own.

## PADRAIC COLUM



# The Narrative Writings of Sean O'Casey

WHEN I read the first volume I thought of Sean O'Casey's memoirs as the counterpart of George Moore's *Hail and Farewell*. Here, I said, is the Dublin that was the opposite of Ely Place and Merrion Square, of the discursive intellectuals, of creative and meditative days, of incomes that left people free to cultivate arts, scholarship and friendships. Out of the memory of a man who wielded the pickaxe and shovel was coming the Dublin of the tenements where people working long days for a few shillings supported themselves on dry bread and tea with a few pints of porter. And against the urbane cosmopolitanism and the comprehensive nationalism of George Moore and his coterie was a thickened particularism, that of a minority amongst the tenement-dwellers for whom their neighbours' religion was idolatry, their neighbours' politics simple disorderliness, the British royal family sacred figures—the under-privileged Dublin Protestants. Sean O'Casey's memoirs were not a supplement to George Moore's: they were a counterpart.

As I read the books that follow *I Knock at the Door* I realized that there was an opposition, too, in their execution. The opposition is between painting and sculpture, between the executant with the brush and the executant with the chisel. I read in *Hail and Farewell*:—

A wreck with rheumatism, looking at me sideways, unable to

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move his neck, his hands and feet swollen. He must have suffered a good deal of pain, but it never showed itself in his face, and though he was well aware his disease was progressive ossification, he did not complain of this hardship in being so strangely afflicted. At that time death did not seem to be very far away, but he did not fear death, and I admired his unruffled mind, often reminding me of a calm evening, and thought myself most fortunate of men when he promised he would stay at my house the next time he came to Dublin.

Anyone who ever met him would recognize Kuno Meyer in this portrait—it is a painting, and it is a modern painting, Impressionist. And this is out of *Drums Under The Window*, the portrait of James Connolly:—

His ears were well set to his head, the nose was a little too thick, and gave an obstinate cast to the bright eyes, and a firm fleshy neck bulged out over a perfectly white hard collar. The head and neck rested solidly on a broad sturdy trunk of a body, and all were carried forward on two short pillar-like legs, slightly bowed, causing him to waddle a little in his walk, as if his legs were, in the way of a joke, trying faintly and fearfully to throw him off his balance.

This contrasts with the suave composition of the painting; it stands out in stone, sculpture, the work of a man with the chisel rather than a man with the brush. I take another passage: it is from *Pictures In The Hallway*, and tells how the owner of the emporium in which Johnny is employed sells his damaged pots and cups to Biddy the huxter:—

Along came the bent back; the shrivelled head, the dangling watch chain; the frosty eyes, trying hard to send a gracious glance at Biddy, standing in front of her, rocking themselves ever so gently on their toes, and jingling keys and money in their pockets; the frosty eyes watching the seamed patterned face of Biddy staring at the woe-begone crockery; the thinned out mouth waiting for her to fire the first words at the shrivelled head, the bending back, and the dangling watch chain.

The figures are linked with other figures in a sort of procession. In this last there is not only the master of the emporium and the old woman; there is the waiting Johnny, the

lane 'marbled with green slime and purple pools, some of them smoking faintly, like half hearted burnt sacrifices to some half forgotten god,' along which cattle go to the slaughter house in which Johnny has seen dying kicks of cattle growing weaker, twitching in the last throes; then becoming all of a sudden stiffly still; where he had often heard the dying bleat of the throat-punctured sheep, entering their end on the cold cobble stones, dying slowly in their own dung. This linking of figures reminds me of native sculpture, the crowded figures of men and animals in the grey stone of the Cross of Monasterboice or the Crosses of Cionmacnoise. It looks as if we had here in a different medium a recovery of the work of ancient native artists.

George Moore picked his own good fortune in coming to Dublin in a period of intellectual incandescence to which he added a blaze. At the other side of the city Johnny Casside of the tenements was fortunate, too. He grew up with people with a distinctive idiom, with racy turns of phrase, and during public events that mattered a great deal to Dubliners—the rise and fall of Parnell, the visit of Queen Victoria, the diffusion of the Gaelic idea, the establishment of a national theatre. His father died when he was an infant; Johnny was reared by a hard-striving widowed mother; there were a couple of brothers and one sister in the family. From the time he was an infant the future Sean O'Casey suffered an excruciating trouble—he had ulcers in his eyes. This prevented his going to school regularly and made him unable to enter games. He became solitary, dependent on his mother, somewhat resentful. But his ailment helped to make him the writer of *The Shadow of a Gunman*, *Juno and the Paycock*, *The Plough and the Stars* and these narratives of his life. Like other half-sighted men he made himself the historian of the tribe. He listened to what was said; he got to know characters through the words they used, through the rhythms of their voices. And this accounts for an impressive quality in Sean O'Casey's writings: they are about people in the same room with oneself, about people at the other side of the street. When he looks for characters outside the room, beyond the street, a deal of their reality slips away from him. And Johnny had what Dubliners of the time seldom had—a strong class-consciousness.

Here is the place to praise Sean O'Casey for his treatment of

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the environment of the poor in Ireland's capital city—their proximity to filth, the bed bugs, the indecently crowded rooms where men, women and children lived and slept. He might have written of this environment complainingly, protestingly. Instead he has written of it defiantly like a man who knows himself to have been imposed upon and will stand no more nonsense from citizens or corporations. And we who have known the shame of these things have our self-respect saved by the uproarious way he brings it all before us.

I have spoken of the likeness of this writing to the sculpture of the grey stone crosses. I think of one who was contemporary with the sculptors, Anier MacConglinne "who would satirize and praise all." Johnny Casside, a lover of books as was MacConglinne, talks back to the bosses as the tenth century student talked back to the monks of Cork. First hear MacConglinne:—

It is not to spare me I ask you, for, though it were asked, it would not be granted me of your own free will, you curs and you robbers and dung-hounds and unlettered brutes, you shifting, blundering, hang-head monks of Cork.

Then hear Johnny:—

That's possibly something to be ashamed of. . . .and let me tell you there's another shilling of mine embedded in the clock you have at home! I could ill-afford it. I gave it unwillingly. I thought joining in the gift would make things safer here. I need a book more'n you need a clock; but keep it; it will remind you of me when the clock strikes.

MacConglinne was as great in praising as he was in upbraiding, and we have Johnny praised in the very spirit of MacConglinne by the Dublin van-driver who was the beneficiary of his thievings from the emporium:—

You're a decent lad, a real decent lad, heart o' th' rowl, he said; the real Annie Daly, he said, one in a thousand, a trusty mate, a lad of a good breed, he said; not like the rest o' them. nose-rags, toe-rags, flittin' afther Mr. Anthony here, and Mr. Hewson there, sucks who would sell their mother for a smile from a boss, he said; but you're a change from all those, a dear change an' a genuine change; an'

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standing' out as a sowl man, a solid man, hindherin' th' rich  
to give help to the poor, sound and thrue in all your dealin's  
with your fellow-man.

And Johnny Casside is treated as unkindly by the office underlings as MacConglinne by the underlings of the abbot:—

The fleshly hand of the dusky faced Hewson sought his shoulder, giving him a push that sent Johnny colliding with the desk of Nearus. "Get out," he said angrily; "this firm has no room for a vulgar corner boy." Dyke snatched the precious book from under Johnny's arm and flung it down the passage way into the dirty straw, a messenger meeting it with a kick that sent it away beyond the dirtier lane. "Follow your book," said Dyke, "to your rightful place in the dirt of the street." "There he'll find his happiness and his hope," said Hyland.

And MacConglinne:—

So it was done. His scanty clothing was stripped off him, and ropes and cords were tied across him to a pillar stone . . . They left that sage MacConglinne to fast.

MacConglinne, whose taunt to his persecutors is repeated by Johnny Casside to his—like the monks of Cork they are unlettered.

The Ireland that aroused the ire and wonder of the tenth century scholar was the monastic, kingly Ireland; the Ireland that arouses the ire and wonder of the twentieth century O'Casey is the employing, bourgeois Ireland. And as in the mediaeval vision, Sean O'Casey's memoirs is crowded with figures of persecuted and persecutors.

We do not know if the dispraisings of the tenth century scholar were always just, but those of us who knew some of the public figures of Sean O'Casey's epoch know that to many of them he has been unjust. He does justice to several of the intellectual and revolutionary leaders of the epoch he reaches in the third volume—to Yeats, Pearse, Larkin, Tom Clarke, Father O'Hickey; he does partial justice to James Connolly. He does injustice to A.E., Arthur Griffith, Douglas Hyde, Eoin

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MacNeill, Countess Marcievicz. Thomas MacDonagh and Joseph Plunkett are mentioned once, and that with a jibe at their poetry. But each wrote beautiful poems and each went to his death knowingly. And there is a passage where Sean O'Casey imagines Arthur Griffith in a sunny field and speculates as to how his grim and tight-lipped vision of Ireland would be changed by that experience. Many's the day the present writer lay in a sunny field beside Arthur Griffith and talked a deal of fantasy. Sean O'Casey puts down some absurd verses which he says Arthur Griffith wrote. On my word, he never did.

Of certain other leaders he quotes, to their belittlement, instances which I know to be wrong. Here is one. I served on a committee that made, I think, the first move towards the formation of the Citizen Army. Captain White, a North of Ireland man, the son of a general in the British Army and himself a former officer, made an offer of what was then a large sum—fifty pounds. "I offer it to buy boots for the striking men," he said (it was during the Transportation Workers' strike of 1913.) "They will have to be drilled; they will have to march; and they can't drill and march in broken boots." It was a practical proposal; it made possible the training of men by Captain White himself, and these trained men—many had been in the British Army—became the Citizen Army. But when Sean O'Casey speaks of Captain White it is to belittle his efforts: he speaks of him as being largely interested in uniforms, contrasting him with the one who had the practical sense as well as the grim determination—Sean O'Casey himself.

The formative moment of Johnny Casside's life is reached in the second volume, *Pictures in the Hallway*. It is when young Johnny goes on the boards of the old Mechanics Theatre as Father Dolan in Dion Boucicault's old fashioned "Shaughraun." He had read and recited Shakespeare but now he had come among Boucicault enthusiasts and he was repeating lines that were close in their words and rhythms to his familiar speech. "'Tis true, but the truth is locked in my soul and heaven keeps the key. . . . Not homeless while I have a roof to shelter them; not beggars, I thank God who gives me a crust to share with them." A modification of Boucicault's speech with Boucicault's timing, Boucicault's soloquay and Boucicault's tableau are to appear, not only in the plays but in the scenes that Sean O'Casey's narratives are to flow into. I say this although it

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is evident that Sean O'Casey would have written dramatically if he had never gone on the boards of the Mechanics Theatre. Shakespeare was in his head. And the very fact that he was pressed to go on the boards shows that his theatrical gift was recognized by his family and his neighbours: he knew Boucicault parts before he was asked to go on. With the power of visualising that a dramatist must have (in spite of his weak eyes he had thought of making himself a painter) Johnny Casside had a memory for speech, a power of noting and reproducing it as well as a delight in what is dramatic in the literature he read.

All the same I will put down Dion Boucicault as a major influence on Sean O'Casey. In many of the scenes in the memoirs there is the Boucicault timing (perhaps as in Boucicault a little prolonged), the consciousness of background, the confrontation of types between whom there is no parity, the soloquay, the tableau. The scenes I have in mind are highly dramatic: the mother hurrying home with the dead child, Johnny's predecessor, in her arms; the wake and funeral of Johnny's father; the sister going off to her wedding without a word from her mother; the old Jew fooled into repairing windows. These are in the first volume. There are scenes in the second volume that are even more actable—where Johnny's mother buys a new suit for him from the sympathetic Jewish dealer, where the presentation of the clock is made to the boss, where the boss sells Biddy the damaged crockery in the alley.

But now comes an influence which I regard as damaging—the influence of *Ulysses* and afterwards of *Finnegan's Wake*. Here is O'Casey when he plays Jeff to Joyce's Mutt:

— I'm Jeeccaysee, the fat man said, the mind knight of the little man, the schnapper-up of God's tremendous trifles; past, present, and to come, the grand chief arranger of the grey-boards at play; awethor of the misuses of divorcey; and this, indicating the little man by his side, is Daabruim, suborned into life to make right what's wrong with the world, and to lead the flat of heretics to the end of the roaman road; and this gentleman, pointing to the one with the slate tablet and the flinty pen, is a newsman from the city of odd in the land that is over the hills and far away, who has come to get from the first father and mother of men the true facts of how you vaulted into life, and the impressions that struck

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you when you woke to the beauty and peace of your God-given garden.

And here is O'Casey in proper person:—

The next day of a dark cold morning, Sean in the forge blowing the bellows to make the fire roar so that the smith might repoint his pick blunted by the work of the day before, for the soil of the deep trench navvies dig, to sow great iron pipes to carry a main supply of water, is hard and stony, and the point of the pick is soon deprived of its eagerness to bite: here in the yellow and red gleam of the fire, watching the smith. . . . Sean saw again the meeting of the night before, the squat, swaying form of Connolly speaking from his box, and the cold staring lens-covered eyes of Griffith watching, the big mouth beneath the great moustaches grim and clenched and silent.

There are certain chapters in *Drums Under the Window* that as I read them make me feel sorry that their writer ever read *Ulysses*, 'Prometheus Hibernica' and 'Song of a Shift.' When I turn back from these to the first chapter I am moved to pray that Sean O'Casey will sweat the Joyce out of his system before he concludes the cycle of his memoirs.

The first chapter deals with Sean's initial job with the pick and shovel. How memorable it is with its knotting veins, tightening chest, sweating forehead, and its staging of individuals of the labour-gang. There is the ganger, Christy Mahon: "He had a rugged, rather distinguished face, a heavy grizzled moustache, a bush of the same sort of hair, tousled as if it had never come within sight of a comb, and his chin, hardy and strong, was covered with a week's growth of hair." Others could have given us such a description. But who other than Sean O'Casey could have gone on to the passage which makes the ganger loom before us like a Cyclops:—

He was the richest man in the hamlet. All life centred round the cow. Up every night he had to be when she was calving, squatting on the bare earthen floor of the byre, a huge, shaking, shadowy figure in a dim pool of light from a storm-lantern, watching every twist and turn of the cow, sensing

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her condition in every moaning bellow she gave, echoing each moan in his own aching, wondering heart; with his wife at home in bed on her back, ears cocked to hear a possible yell from her husband to come and give her fellow a hand with the suffering animal; while the few houses round hers sank into the night's silence, for they had not on them the care of a cow calving. There he sat in the darkness and dirt, cooped in with the cow, the heat from her boiy and the steam from her nostrils enfolding them both and making them one, a thick needle threaded with a thick cord near by, ready to stitch her belly up if it got torn during the delivery. His life, literature, art and leisure were all embedded in the cow calving.

Sean O'Casey is at his best in carving out these lonely, ruminative, figures: there is the warder in Kilmainham, veteran of the Crimean war, who sits before the fire in his little room with warders' caps, carbines, batons hanging above him and his mind on the son who was gaoled and had to fly the country on account of being a Fenian.

These memoirs show Sean O'Casey as a great writer who is prone to a great fault: the fault is wilfulness; it is shown not only in the unconventional incidents and expressions which he makes use of, but in an abandonment to his own issues and his own idiom. Take the first chapter in *Pictures in the Hallway*, the description of the death of Parnell as it affects Johnny's family: it begins magnificently, goes on memorably, and then we come to lose patience because we think the writer isn't going to hold back from saying anything that comes into his head. "But the O'Briens, the Dillons, and the Healys, mud-men, bedmen, deadmen, spedmen, spudment, dudmen, poked on by the bishops," and so on and so on, passage after passage of wilfulness. A like wilfulness is shown in other chapters 'Gaelstroem' in *Drums under the Window*, for example. The study of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* has not helped Sean O'Casey to curb this wilfulness.

But there he is, the MacConglinne of our day. He makes no approach to MacConglinne's comic lyricism (rare in itself

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and wonderful in its organic relation to the narrative) but the rhymes and odd verses he scatters through his pages show that he is aware that the lyrical should go with the realistic, the turbulent and the mocking. There he is, the man who was able to set in counterpoint the degradation of the Dublin tenements and the vision of a resurgent Gaeldom!



## CHRISTINE LONGFORD

# Maria Edgeworth and Her Circle

IT is nearly a hundred years since Miss Edgeworth died. She had fame in her lifetime, and was feted in London and Paris; her books were translated into French and German; she inspired Turgenev and Walter Scott. Now she is remembered as a didactic spinster, a pious great-aunt; in Ireland especially there is a reaction against her as ideologically objectionable, as a female monster of the Ascendency who pic-nicked on the battlefield of Ballinamuck. But if she is not read, she is not forgotten. People make excuses for not reading her; and the best excuse is that her books are not easy to find. They have to be hunted in libraries and on second-hand bookstalls, and borrowed from country houses that have not been sold up.

*Castle Rackrent.* An Hibernian Tale. Taken from Facts, and from the Manners of the Irish Squires before the year 1782. Taken from Facts. That is an extraordinary description for a first novel, when we are accustomed to the note 'All the characters in this book are purely imaginary,' which nobody believes. First novels are apt to be autobiographical, and full of peevish attacks on parents, nurses, teachers and rivals. Maria Edgeworth's is taken from facts, and ye' there is no heroine in it; there are no sneers at oppressive elders, no complaints of youth misunderstood. It is set in a period before she knew Ireland, is entirely objective, and might have been written by a man. In 1782 she was fifteen, and her father brought her back from school in England, and settled down himself to the exacting career, as he saw it, of Irish landlordism. An eccentric genius, a scholar, lawyer, engineer, inventor and political thinker, he had advanced theories of

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education and believed that women were rational creatures. So from the first he allowed his little daughter to help him with his accounts and to ride with him over the country. That is how she learned about leases, middlemen, driving and pounding; weed-ashes and sealing-money, duty turkeys and duty geese; gates and fences and slates and shingles; smiths, farriers, gaugers and excisemen; barrack-rooms and turfstacks and schools and shebeens. In fact she was trained as a land-agent. And her best teacher, after her father, was John Langan his steward. John Langan was Thady Quirk. When she was thirty, Maria imagined a family history as John Langan would tell it; and that was *Castle Rackrent*. She knew John so well, that she felt she could think and speak as Thady without effort. He seemed to dictate to her, and she wrote as fast as her pen could go. She could not remember changing a word of the story, or making any addition between the lines. She started it for amusement, and without any idea of publishing, and left it for two years between the first and the second part; and when it was finished, she made no copy, but sent the original manuscript to the press. It was published anonymously, and was so successful that an imposter claimed to have written it, and took the trouble to copy out several pages in his own hand, with corrections and erasures where Maria had made none. The second edition was published under her own name.

Miss Edgeworth made Thady older than John Langan had been in '82, so that he might remember more generations of the Rackrents. The characters of his story were compounded of incidents she had heard and people she had seen. But she could not believe she had ever thought of them before she began to write, and she had made no sort of plan. Conscientiously she admitted that the story of the imprisoned lady bore some resemblance to the story of Lady Cathcart, which she had heard; but Sir Kit was not like Mr. McGuire, and she knew nothing of Lady Cathcart except that she was fond of money, and would not give up her diamonds. 'Indeed the real people had been so long dead that little was known of them.' Oddly enough, there is another story well known in Westmeath, of the Lady Belvedere who was shut up by her husband for thirty years; but Maria had never thought of that at all. The history of Sir Condy was not drawn from life, but the character was suggested by a relation of the Edgeworths that her father remembered. Mr. Edgeworth in his own memoirs describes the extravagance and ruin of his un-named relation, who

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eighteen was remarkably handsome, a hard drinker and 'quite uninformed.' The young gentleman made a bad match when scarcely twenty, and his wife's family lived luxuriously in his house for two or three years. The wine-merchant presented a bill which would have been excessive if the gentleman's horses had drunk claret. The gentleman lost his health and his appetite, and took to his bed; he was sent a basin of bread and milk, and the bread was hard and black and was the outside of the loaf of which a pudding had been made for dinner. He threw the basin away, never held his head up again, and soon died of a broken heart. But the death of Sir Condyl is better than this story, which was told to young Edgeworth as a fact. The account of the election is based on an experience of Mr. Edgeworth; and he had a more memorable experience over a 'raking pot of tea.' I recommend the note on this institution, the girls' tea-party after a ball. 'Now and then it has happened that some of the male species who were either more audacious or more highly favoured than the rest of their sex, have been admitted by stealth to these orgies.' It happened that Richard Edgeworth, at the age of fifteen, was admitted to such a party, after his sister's wedding to Mr. Fox of Fox Hall, and was involved in a parody of the wedding service. A young friend put on a white cloak for a surplice and married Richard to a curate's daughter, with the key of the door for a ring. Marriage laws were peculiar in those days, and his father was so alarmed that he brought a suit in the ecclesiastical court to annul the ceremony; so Richard was married and divorced before he was sixteen. It was a foreshadowing of his adult taste, as he had four marriages later, not counting one in Scotland. Sir Condyl also eloped to Scotland. But all the incidents, Miss Edgeworth said, were inventions; the settings were facts. She denied that her characters were types: 'they cost me no trouble, and were made by no *receipt* or thought of philosophical classification'; and she protected herself by saying they were extinct in 1782, just as the raking pot of tea was 'long since banished from the higher orders of the Irish gentry.'

The settings have changed, but the characters are not obsolete. Extravagance, humour, brutality, litigiousness, avarice, bad marriages and bad housekeeping are not extinct in Ireland or elsewhere; and girls still giggle after a party. In spite of the Union, against which Mr. Edgeworth voted, and the Absenteeism which Miss Edgeworth deplored; in spite of the Famine which she lived to see, and the Land Acts which

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abolished the landlords after her time, there are still fabulous characters in rural Ireland. Even the last revolution has not extinguished them. The Irish gentry die hard. *Castle Rackrent* is still of interest, as a social document and an entertainment. Though it cost Miss Edgeworth no trouble, she wrote for instruction as well as amusement. She saw that the Irish land-system was fantastic, and that no one was good enough to be a landlord, except Mr. Edgeworth and a few friends. She was full of moral and social purpose, and as propagandist as Bernard Shaw.

I have the good fortune to write this with shelves of Miss Edgeworth's works ready to hand, and three volumes of her letters privately printed. I am in a room she liked, in a house she often visited. Mr. Edgeworth was a cousin of the first Lord Longford, and it was at Pakenham Hall that he developed a taste for reading. As a boy he was fond of shooting; Lady Longford let him have all the shooting he wanted, but gave him the key of the library as well; and as she expected, he soon preferred books to snipe. That was one of the stories with which he illustrated his theories of rational education; and the son and grand-children of that lady were Maria's friends. Pakenham Hall is twelve Irish miles from Edgeworthstown, over a bog-road which was bad in those days and is still rough; and there was an awkward ferry they called the 'float', where there is now a bridge and Float Station. Sometimes the Longfords sent horses to meet their friends at the float; and the third lord played a rustic joke there on Maria's cousin Bess FitzHerbert. A man met her with two bullocks, and the message that these were the only beasts his lordship could spare. His lordship was hiding behind a hedge to see how she took it. The same lord was as excited as a brother when Mr. Edgeworth raised a home-produced spire to the top of the church tower by an original feat of engineering. Maria was devoted to Kitty Pakenham, who became Duchess of Wellington, and even more to Caroline, who was 'as quick as lightning,' and would sing a song on any occasion, 'in an inn or anywhere.' Once Maria stayed with them when they sat down thirty-two to dinner, and a party of twenty went to a grand ball of Mrs Pollard's at Kinturk. Lord Longford marshalled his guests in the great hall, and sent off carriage after carriage of them; and supper at Kinturk was so crowded that Caroline and Maria agreed to use one arm each, to bring their food to their mouths. They stayed till between three and four in the morning. Meanwhile Maria's driver had been amusing himself

at a 'club,' (we can imagine the modern equivalent), in Castlepollard; and on the way back, he did not know the ditch from the road. There was snow on the ground. He passed Mr. Dease's carriage; he tried to pass Mr. Tuite's, ran into a snow-drift and overturned. But Maria was rescued unhurt by Admiral Pakenham, who picked her up like a doll (she was very small), and set her on the step of Mr. Tuite's carriage, so that not even her shoes were wet. They could not get the coach out that night, but a man was sent to sleep in it, 'that nobody else might, and that no one might steal the glasses.' Maria established a reputation for courage. Caroline read some French memoirs aloud to her on that visit, and Maria read her latest work to the Pakenhams, who took it as a kindness, and not as an 'exhibition.'

I know a house in this neighbourhood which according to local folklore is Castle Rackrent; but as it is also supposed to be the original 'East Lynne,' I am not sure I can believe it. I have actually seen Edgeworthstown House when the family was still in it, and the rooms where Maria worked: her own tiny room, which Mr. Edgeworth improved with a new window and the library where she wrote more often, undisturbed by a large family of step-brothers and step-sisters. She had a movable table made by her father, which she could wheel from the fireplace to the window, or into a recess behind the pillars. There she wrote amusing, affectionate private letters, as well as business letters and books. 'I really think,' she said, 'that if my thoughts and feelings were shut up within me, I should burst in a week, like a steam engine without a safety-valve.' She looked forward to seeing her neighbours; and I have enjoyed visiting the same families, the Pollards at Kinturk, the Deases at Turbotston, the Smyths at Gaybook and the Lefroys at Carriglas. Now there are no more Edgeworths at Edgeworthstown: no **more Deases at Turbotston**, where Maria admired the double pinks; and the house where she was squashed at supper has been immensely enlarged, and is a maternity hospital run by nuns of the Sacred Heart. Maria, who spent her life in social service, would have appreciated this institution. She was not, in her own phrase, 'bitter Orange.' The model school at Edgeworthstown was undenominational, and the priest and the parson gave religious instruction at the same hour in adjoining rooms. Maria was not a souper, and she did not write tracts. She thought it funny when her cousin Bess at Black Castle had a dream of a pious lady reading a tract called 'the

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Penitent Poodle.'

There are no more FitzHerberts at Black Castle, no more Malones at Baronston, no more—but the list is too long. There are still Smyths at Gaybrook, Longfords at Pakenham Hall and Lefroys at Carrigglas. Now, Carrigglas suggests something extraordinary which might have happened. Jane Austen might have been Mrs. Lefroy of Carrigglas, a house within dining distance of Edgeworthstown. When she was twenty-one, she flirted, danced and sat out with young Tom Lefroy to the point of scandal at Steventon. She was expecting a proposal which she was prepared to accept on condition that he gave up a light morning coat, which was the only thing about him that she disliked. But the proposal never came. Tom Lefroy went back to the Irish bar, married someone else and became Chief Justice of Ireland. If he had married Jane, she and Maria would have been near neighbours. Would they have been close friends? Maria was eight years older than Jane, and well established as a writer before her. They corresponded politely; Jane spoke highly of Maria, and Maria spoke critically of *Persuasion*, to other people. If Jane had been Mrs Lefroy, Miss Edgeworth would have called, invited her to dinner and driven her over the bogs. They were both perfect ladies as well as born writers, both well educated and accomplished and fond of family life. They would have had some good jokes together. They would have exchanged cuttings for their gardens and receipts for their cooks. But would they have influenced each other's work? Would Jane have written about Ireland? Would Maria have learned something new about writing? Jane was the better artist. Maria, I think, would have been a kinder, a more practical, a more sociable neighbour in the Irish countryside.

## VIVIAN MERCIER



# Speech After Long Silence

A NATION, once rich in imaginative literature, has been sunk for years, perhaps centuries, in glum and stubborn silence. Suddenly its voice speaks out loud and clear, so that all the world must listen. Why? And how, after so long a silence, can the unpractised voice speak with such firm, unhesitating utterance?

This sudden impassioned "speech after long silence" has burst from many a country in the past hundred years, but most impressively from Norway and Ireland. It is of the Irish literary revival that I wish to speak, so my title, from a poem by Yeats, is doubly appropriate. The Irish revival was, among other things, a revival of the *spoken word*. Douglas Hyde, Lady Gregory, Synge, Yeats, Joyce, were all in their different ways concerned about the proper literary use of folk speech. A similar revival was begun in American literature by Gertrude Stein's *Three Lives* (1909), where she sought to describe the inner life of simple people in the natural cadences of their outward speech. I hesitate to claim that the Irish, as well as Mark Twain, influenced Miss Stein; I can find no authority for it in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. At any rate the end of both movements, and of their influence on world literature, is not yet in sight. Even the insulated French have felt it—Céline, Malraux, Sartre will testify to that.

I can answer the second question in my opening paragraph fairly easily and quickly, though the first will take more time and trouble: *no* literary revival happens overnight, but

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Ireland's preliminary starts and stutters remained unheard. At least two generations of teachers were needed to prepare Ireland's voice for her *début*; their names, though remembered in Ireland, are unknown to the world at large. Robert Farren's new book, *The Course of Irish Verse*, tells of many nineteenth-century poetical experimenters, most of whom translated from the Gaelic. Beside them were working a number of scholars and *dilettanti*—philologists, archæologists, historians, collectors of folklore—all busy creating for the Irish people a "living past."

The most valuable segment of that past, though it may not at first have seemed so, was the great mass of mythology then recovered, either from ancient manuscripts or in its current form as folklore. Without it, the Irish revival could never have taken place. The two elements of folk speech and folk lore exist independently in Anglo-Irish literature through most of the nineteenth century; only when they meet and coalesce can we point to the true beginning of the literary revival.

Folk speech had been used in Anglo-Irish literature for the sake of its humour and colour since at least 1800, when Maria Edgeworth wrote *Castle Rackrent*. But the myths and legends were at first in the hands of men who felt themselves far removed from the folk by their scholarship. Such a man was Sir Samuel Ferguson, who made good English poetry out of the myths without ever quite understanding them; he often seems to shake his head and sigh over their benighted and bloody paganism. Another was Standish O'Grady, who retold them as part epic, part history, in would-be Biblical English. Here is a characteristic passage taken almost at random from his *Triumph of Cuchulain*:—

And Etercomal answered, "Thou art comely indeed, and not unwarlike to look upon, but amongst great warriors thou wouldest not be noticed at all, nor even amongst forward striplings wouldest thou attract any considerable attention."

The first real landmark of the Irish revival is Douglas Hyde's *Love Songs of Connacht* (1893), in which he translated Gaelic folk poems, and his own Gaelic prose commentary on them, word for word into the folk speech of the now English-speaking peasants. In doing so, he made clear just how much of the idiom in that speech was already the product of direct translation from the Gaelic. Any reader who is familiar with the plays of Synge can recognise the similarity between his language

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and that in the following sentences from Hyde:—

'Tis the cause of this song—a bard who gave love to a young woman, and he came into the house where she herself was with her mother at the fall of night. The old woman was angry, him to come, and she thought to herself what would be the best way to put him out again. . .

Hyde's lucky hit enabled Yeats and Lady Gregory to sense a new dignity in folk speech, sharply contrasting with the stage-Irish "broth-of-a-boy" swagger of the dialect used in the past. Yet another nine years were to go by before the last, logical step was taken by Lady Gregory—that of retelling the myths in the folk speech discovered by Hyde. Her *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* appeared in 1902, and from that year dates the great period of the revival. Synge found in this book "the dialect he had been trying to master." He wrote to Lady Gregory, "Your *Cuchulain* is a part of my daily bread." Yeats began his preface with the words, "I think this book is the best that has come out of Ireland in my time." Lady Gregory herself claimed later:—

I was the first to use the Irish idiom as it is spoken, with intention and with belief in it. Dr. Hyde indeed has used it with fine effect in his *Love Songs of Connacht* but alas! gave it up afterwards, in deference to some Dublin editor.

Here is a passage from Lady Gregory that roughly parallels the one quoted from O'Grady, though obviously taken from a different version of the story:—

"You look to me as good a fighter as I ever saw for one of your age," said Etarcomai, "but you would not be thought much of among trained fighters and grown men."

Except for its slow peasant rhythm, there happens to be nothing self-consciously Irish or "folk" about this passage; it is simply good writing. Compare it with the "thees" and "thous," the "poetic" diction and inversions—in fact, all the false rhetoric of the O'Grady version, and it becomes clear that a new and compelling voice had broken the silence.

In the seven years between the publication of this book and the death of Synge there appeared all Synge's folk plays and two of Colum's, Yeats's and Synge's plays about Deirdre, the best and best of Yeats's six Cuchulain plays—*On Baile's Strand*—and many other noteworthy poems and plays. Lady Gregory herself, besides writing several plays, brought out her version

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of the second Irish mythological cycle—that of Finn and the Fianna—in *Gods and Fighting Men* (1904).

All this in itself was a great deal for one book to inspire, but I think one must give Lady Gregory credit for an even greater achievement. To my mind her book helped to make possible the whole later and greater development of Yeats's poetry, for it gave him a far deeper understanding of the nature of myth than he had had before. For the moment:—

Players and painted stage took all my love,  
And not those things that they were emblems of.

Besides, he was then preoccupied in his lyric poetry with "personal utterance . . . as fine an escape from rhetoric and abstraction as drama itself"—again the emphasis on the spoken word. But from about 1917 until his death in 1939, having in the meanwhile solved the problem of style so that every word in his poetry sounded like authentic speech, he wrote a number of poems which not only embody myths from all over the world but even seem to create new ones.

It is now time to consider just what constitutes myth, and why the understanding of it should have a wholly beneficent influence upon the work of a major poet. The answer lies at least partly in the fields of anthropology and psychology. Essentially, a myth is the spoken accompaniment of an acted ritual; when the rite falls into abeyance, the myth carries on as "literature," gathering to itself non-mythical elements as it goes. Myth preserved into modern times by word of mouth is a part of folklore; it may yet be proved that *all* folklore stems from myth.

Some thirty years or more ago, a group of English classical scholars were well on the way to proving that all art originates in magical ritual. Naturally this was easiest to prove in the case of Greek drama, both comedy and tragedy, because Aristotle had already dropped a hint or two. Jane Harrison went on to prove it for Greek sculpture too—the Parthenon frieze being merely a ritual preserved in marble. Painting's first use was to portray magical charms and the wished-for results of magical performances—in other words, painting *was* magic. As for music, it is an indispensable accompaniment of all ritual, even to-day.

Hence contact with myth puts the modern creative artist—whatever his medium—once more in communication with ritual,

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the source of all art. It does even more than that, however, for it also puts him in touch with earlier stages of man's psychic development. In Jung's view, all consciousness has evolved out of unconsciousness; the ego may be conscious and personal, but deep below it lies the collective unconscious—the memory of the race, if you like—which is impersonal and common to all of us. We only become aware of it in dreams and visions, but it is peopled by symbols and personifications—"archetypes," Jung calls them. These archetypes correspond to figures and symbols in the universal myths, which are found in slightly different forms the world over.

Yeats, largely through intuition, reached a position very similar to Jung's. He had the advantage of beginning, as Jung has ended, with alchemical symbolism—see Jung's *The Integration of the Personality*—and he borrowed from Plato the concept of the World Soul or *Anima Mundi*, which corresponds to the collective unconscious. His own view of the importance of myth to his work he expressed as follows:—

Because those imaginary people are created out of the deepest instinct of man, to be his measure and his norm, whatever I can imagine these mouths speaking may be the nearest I can go to truth.

"Truth" here does not mean scientific truth, but psychological, poetic truth. Poetry, all writers on semantics agree, represents a pre-scientific use of language.

I have claimed Joyce as a figure of the Irish revival, though his first published work, *The Day of the Rabblement*, was a pamphlet attacking the Irish theatre movement for what he considered its provincial Irishness. Flaubert, Ben Jonson, Ibsen, were his models, rather than any Irishman; in *Finnegans Wake*, however, he set out to re-create, through the dreaming of one man in one night's sleep, the entire collective unconscious of humanity, complete with all its myths and archetypes. Setting out in the opposite direction to Yeats, he thus finished at the same destination.

There is mythology in Joyce's earlier work, too, but it is almost exclusively Greek. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* his hero, Stephen Dedalus, has a vision of himself as Icarus, son of Daedalus, "a hawklike man flying sunward above the sea . . . a symbol of the artist forging anew in his workshop out of the sluggish matter of the earth a new soaring impalpable imperishable being." In *Ulysses* Joyce portrays a Jungian arch-

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etype—the wise, older man, “Odysseus of many wiles.” While making a study of all mythology for *Finnegans Wake* he perhaps came at last to see the value in the Irish myths which he had spurned earlier. It is hardly necessary to say anything about Joyce’s use of folk speech, since certain episodes in *Ulysses* are already known as classics in that vein. I should add, however, that Joyce’s “folk” are, of course, city dwellers instead of the traditional peasantry.

Two years before he died, in a poem entitled *The Municipal Gallery Revisited*, Yeats summed up his literary movement thus:—

John Synge, I and Augusta Gregory, thought  
All that we did, all that we said or sang  
Must come from contact with the soil, from that  
Contact everything Antæus-like grew strong.

The “soil” he speaks of was the soil of Ireland—and by extension the folk who tilled it—but soil needs water in order to become fertile. In Jung’s method of dream interpretation water, be it river, lake or sea, symbolizes the collective unconscious. Both Yeats and Joyce drew fecundating water from that dark nocturnal stream of images—“the rivering waters of, hither-andthithering waters of. Night!”



## BOOK REVIEWS



HOLES IN THE SKY, 1944-1947, by Louis MacNeice (*Faber and Faber, Ltd.*, 7/6).

THE UNDYING DAY, by Robert Greacen (*Falcon Press, Ltd.*, 7/6).

Mr. MacNeice and Mr. Greacen are each searching for an audience. Mr. Greacen, the younger writer, has the more passive approach. He suffers 'the indifferent city' and 'this alien world.' Mr. MacNeice has been actively searching for an audience since the early 'Thirties. At that time his idea was to pummel his readers into shape:

Go back where your instincts call  
And listen to the crying of the town-cats and taxis  
again,  
Or wind your gramophone and eavesdrop on great  
men.

He found an audience of sorts. His cynicism was amusing; his social approach to the mystery of man was of the time. It was at best a fitful audience, kept together only by a clever phrase or self-conscious jingle. If only, one felt, the audience would enlarge itself, unify itself, the poet would dispense poetry more generously. It did not happen and now the search takes a new direction. At first there is a natural regret that the old way yielded little; the war-years are seen as *Hiatus*:

The years that do not count—Civilians in the towns  
Remained the same age as in Nineteen-Thirty-Nine,  
Saying last year, meaning the last of peace.

The new ways opens hesitantly:  
That the world will never be quite—what a cliché—the  
same again

But in the use of the cliché there is courage. The National

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Gallery pictures, back from their war-time hiding places, are seen with awakened eyes:

... here is our Past wiping the smuts from his eyes, girding his loins

The world is now 'a vital but changeless world.' The pictures are alive because they are 'armed with the full mystique of the commonplace.'

The new direction emerges clearly in the longest poem in this volume, *The Stygian Banks*:

We must avoid

That haunting wish to fuse all persons together.

There remains Ireland. The Celtic hangover might yet endanger this new world of Tom, Dick and Harry, of Tom and Tessy: 'the air is so soft that it smudges the words.' The cry of the earlier years, 'banned for ever from the candles of the Irish poor,' is again heard, this time with a new strength:

Torn from birth from where my fathers dwelt,  
Schooled from the age of ten to a foreign voice,  
Yet neither western Ireland nor southern England  
Cancels this interlude; what chance misspelt  
May never now be righted by my choice.

But this is at best an admission. There is still 'a defeated music that yearns and abdicates.' Brandan, 'sprindrift hermit,' could free himself because

One thought of God, one feeling of the ocean.  
Fused in the moving body, the unmoved soul,  
Made him a part of a not to be parted whole.

This freedom is not to be had by one:

... who am neither Brandan

Free of all roots nor yet a rooted peasant.

Many readers may long for the older manner; some may consider it was more assured. The audience is to be wooed now rather than forced. In that is, perhaps, a deeper and more lasting assurance. These new poems, too, show a surer handling of the poem as a unit. The tendency to virtuoso lines and the glib colloquialism still remains but there are many poems with a symphonic build-up of thought and language. At times one feels that Mr. MacNeice must be the finest technician writing English verse. One feels this even in reading the longer poems where loose writing is evident. He chooses not to write fully-flavoured poems because, as I see it, he still lacks the feel of an audience.

Dublin is Mr. Greacen's city of exile, 'this careless Augustan city of grace and slums,' where he finds:

Only the moist, stale odours carried by the wind

Only the flotsam and jetsam the Anglo-Irish left behind.

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His native city yields only, 'the barbarous, clamorous red of Belfast's trams of childhood.' In London there is only 'hopeless frenzy.'

Mr. Greacen's work is unresponsive. The sky is 'numb' or 'grey-blanket,' life is 'cardboard,' man is 'everyone' or 'nobody.' He has, it would seem, one response symbolized for him in fallen (and falling) leaves, 'the whole wild grief of autumn,' 'season of dead negatives.' Whatever the response is, it fails to emerge and remains unrealised.

This failure of expression might account for his surprise when communication is achieved, 'I found her penetrate my mind.' It probably does account for the temptation to merge in the mass:

After hatred's harvest joy will march, shrouded, to Finaghy.

Mr. Greacen is a young man but seems uneasy in his youth. He writes before he gets any response from himself and then, too often, writes carelessly. To lament for France, pray for Russia or to fix the relations of the artist and the crowd appears easy to him. It was always thus with youth. More seriously, Mr. Greacen has no great respect for words or form. Without this he will continue to hamper his lyric talent of which promise is given in *Love (1940)*. This poem is real (all except one line) because—for one reason—it is unashamedly adolescent.

P. J. MADDEN.

AN SIOL (*An Chuallacht Ghaedhealach, University College Cork*), 1/-.

There is a great deal of good reading—80 full pages—in this special number of An Siol, compiled in honour of Professor Daniel Corkery, who has retired from Cork University, having acted there for over 15 years as Professor of English.

As a frontispiece we have Seamus Murphy's fine bust of Professor Corkery. A poem of homage, by Sean O Rioghphardain follows:

'Arise and sing our hearts' thanks to him  
Who showed us the way,  
Who wakened the deer of poetry for us  
In the forests of the years.'

In a Foreword, by Riobard MacGabhrain, the anthology is offered to Daniel Corkery 'as a token of our respect. In token also of our gratitude to him, for all that he has taught us.'

There are delightful poems, including Sean O Tuama's 'Song Of The Mad Woman,' which won a prize at last year's

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Oireachtas. This poem reminds me of an old woman I knew once, who was astray in her wits. She was always hoping to meet her father or her mother on the road. 'There's only blue eyes in our family,' she would say. Perhaps this occasional longing for blue eyes is but symbolic of our nostalgia for the Skies. One thinks of Keats' sonnet in answer to Reynold's:

Dark eyes are dearer far  
Than those that mock the hyacinthine bell—  
in which he exclaims:  
BLUE! 'Tis the life of heaven,—the domain  
Of Cynthia,—the wide palace of the sun,—  
                                       . . . . . and, that Queen  
Of secrecy, the Violet: what strange powers  
Hast thou, as a mere shadow! But how great,  
When in an Eye thou art alive with fate!

There are learned articles on Poetry, Music, the Drama, and on other subjects. We are given a good sprinkling of humour; there are scraps of folk-lore from Ring. And, last but not least, there are excellent stories. One about a Sheep-Dog, by Mairtin O Cadhain, is a very powerful and moving story. I confess, I had to look at the concluding paragraph, before I had honestly come to it—in dread lest the old warrior should have met his Waterloo. I should not have had the heart to read on. Mairtin O Cadhain has a splendid vocabulary—a good Irish word for everything he wants to say. As we are reminded in a note, Liam O Flaithbheartaigh has referred to him as one of the greatest short-story writers in Europe.

The author of 'The Hidden Ireland,' who has done so much for our literature, has been accorded a noble tribute in this varied and most entertaining number of *An Siol*.

### BLANAIID SALKELD

SMOKY CRUSADE, by R. M. Fox (*The Hogarth Press*, 5..)

*Smoky Crusade*, first published in the late Thirties and now reissued in a cheap edition, is one of those autobio-historical volumes that have become increasingly popular in recent years. Mr. Fox writes a direct, gritty, incisive style, charged with the intensity of a man sure of his sense of direction—a direction limited, to my mind, by an almost exclusively political interest, even though the politics are founded on a broad humanitarian attitude.

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The early chapters deal with industrial conditions in England a few decades ago, as seen by a boy rudely pushed out at too tender an age into the world of men and machines. And the story of how the boy develops into manhood and comes to find an anchorage in Socialist faith is well, indeed movingly told. From then on the book fills with passionate orators, street agitators, harmless cranks, simple men and women determined to have a better deal for themselves and their fellows. For the author an adventure has begun; and he takes us on an eager though difficult and wearying, quest with an unflagging gusto. Writing of Mrs. Pankhurst's struggle for the women's franchise Mr. Fox puts his finger on the motive force of his own adventure in politics:—

I realised. . .that that quality of selfless crusade which she brought into the struggle was the greatest thing in the world —a quality without which no great cause would ever be won.

But perhaps the most valuable section of this account of a modern crusade is the detailed descriptions of the author's treatment in various prisons—and of prison life in general—whither he was sent for opposition, on political grounds, to the first World War. Mr. Fox saw that War as a clash between rival imperialisms, an affair for capitalists and their dupes, an Armageddon that could only result in a lowering of working-class standards of life. He is less concerned by what I should regard as the central issue—the killing and wounding of man by man. His courage at courts-martial and in the great loneliness of the locked cell burns steadily through these prison pages.

Oxford, a visit to Soviet Russia (then in her infancy), trips to an Ireland of faction, violence and confusion, personalities of fame and promise, post-War Germany, the heart-aches of paying the rent by free-lancing—these are some of the topics discussed in the concluding chapters. As elsewhere, Mr. Fox plays the role of shrewd and candid observer, conscious of his sense of mission. *Smoky Crusade* ends with a clarion-call of optimism, especially welcome in this our day of disillusion and uncertainty:—

The Hitlers and Mussolinis may scourge the rebels, they may imprison, torture and intimidate. They may silence men of worth. But they cannot silence humanity for ever. They need the workers in the factories. Do you not think that the sons and brothers of their victims will talk together over

## BOOK REVIEWS

these crimes? The factories are the cradle of this revolutionary force which is destined to clear the way for a better order. Our generation has seen Czarist oppression crash before the might of workers and soldiers, we have seen the assertion of free nationhood made in Ireland and we have witnessed the political emancipation of women. Now we see the industrial working class, disciplined and taught solidarity by its labour, rising to do battle against those forces which prevent it making full use of the productive powers which history has put into its hands.

ROBERT GREACEN

TWO LOVELY BEASTS AND OTHER STORIES, by Liam O'Flaherty (*Victor Gollancz, Ltd. 9/6.*)

Mr. O'Flaherty is an unorthodox realist. His writing is so full of poetry, passion and idealism that he gives the impression of finding in naturalism, in which he is so adept, the key to a romantic vision. What the vision may be it would be difficult to say in a few words, but its values are clear enough: a delight in those qualities of spontaneousness and innocence which man may share with the beast, and a hatred of all that is knowing, thwarted and deliberately unnatural. Perhaps he is too greatly moved to exalt the attributes of primitive nature in seeing them threatened by a civilisation in which the terms "animal" and "bestial" are used to describe conditions of degradation far transcending the ingenuity of any mere beast. At the same time he qualifies his vision of the natural man with quite other than animal attributes—notably, compassion and the tragic sense.

Man, too, has choice, though it would seem that in O'Flaherty's view this is sometimes a mixed blessing. In *The Parting*, for instance, where the Aran parents make the hard decision to send their boy to the mainland for schooling, one feels that the step taken is a step down. In *Two Lovely Beasts*, however, the predicament of the peasant who rises above his condition and thereby cuts himself off from his fellows, is depicted in a light of ruthless beauty. This story, in its combination of intensity with fulness, is the work of a supreme master of the short story. In *The Touch*—first published in *Irish Writing*—the lovers, through the avariciousness of the girl's match-making father, are never to know more

## IRISH WRITING

than a touching of hands in their strong and splendid passion. The story is haunting in its wild setting of a strand swept by hailstorms, where the lovers work together gathering seaweed under their elder's watchful eye—a setting so curiously akin to that of Dante's "second circle of sad hell," where, as in Keats's later vision, the frustrated lovers toil "amid the gust, the whirlwind and the flaw of hailstones." Frustrated love such as may thwart even the life of primitive simplicity in Connemara or Aran is again the theme of *The Wedding*, where the giddy, demented Nuala, girlish and aged, is an unforgettable figure. Here, too, is a fine example of Mr. O'Flaherty's powers of atmospheric evocation, for although the action throughout takes place indoors, in none other of these stories is the sense of natural background so strong. "[Her hair] was very dirty and bedraggled. When she cast it loose from the knot and shook her head, it stood out like a miserable bunch of withered sea-grass that has been bitten here and there by a stray donkey." It is by such touches that O'Flaherty creates his indivisible world of people, creatures and things.

Beautiful and poignant stories are *Life*, *The Old Woman* and *Galway Bay*, while *The Challenge*, describing a brewing street brawl, and *Grey Seagull*, the story of a racehorse ridden to victory by an elderly lady of squireen stock, are alike in their element of winged excitement. *The Beggars* is a debonair group-piece. Here, too, are a few more of this writer's incomparable animal stories.

Mr. O'Flaherty never "nods"—he is far too wakeful for that—but there are in this volume at least two—though readable descents to the second-rate: the melodramatic *Eriktion*, and the over-romantic *The Flute Player*.

T.S.

## BOOK REVIEWS

THE LION TAMER AND OTHER STORIES, by Bryan MacMahon (*Macmillan, 8/6*).

Bryan MacMahon's first collection of short stories is work of a highly individualistic character and its individualism lies almost wholly in the author's prose style. Quotations almost at random illustrate its quality:—

'Now and again a ragamuffin wind, shot with gaseous green slime, clambered up the ladders in the river walls and shrugged its facile way in and out of the arcades and ice-cream parlours. The curves of the lamp-standards interpreted benevolence in terms of cement.'

'The saddler spoke first. He said it was all his bloody eye. I felt the wrong keynote had been sounded. The man should have rung the middle C of pleasant pretence.'

'I was tempted to hang some cloth on the conversational peg of England.'

That is what one meets all through the book—descriptions that are fanciful, brimming over with the richest colour, even Disneyish in spots—a rhapsody of metaphors. If the author were to describe his own style, he might liken its effect to that of the headiest *liqueur*: comparatively safe and rather thrilling when taken in sips; but apt to explode like a fireracker on ones literary palate if the glass should be drained at a gulp.

But more intriguing is an examination of the effect this style has on the work itself. The overall result is lopsidedness of balance—a lopsidedness which, if it taxes the patience of the non-Irish reader, will, on the other hand, probably warm the heart of the Irish one. The reason for this is that when Bryan MacMahon tells a story, the emphasis is almost always on the *telling*. Consequently, much of this volume is a matter of sketch, or anecdote, or cameo. Few of the stories have a real plot, hard to the feel. And because he tells his tales so well, and is so obviously enjoying himself, the author is content with this state of affairs.

True, his characters do stand out. But one feels them rather to have the sharpness of pictures looked at through stereoscopic

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lenses: they seem three-dimensional, absolutely palpable, but one knows that it is really a kind of white magic.

Nevertheless, I think it likely that Mr. MacMahon is fully aware of what he is about because it is noticeable that the few times he wishes to write a real story, his style disengages itself from its festooning fol-de-lols and becomes much more serious. One of these occasions produces *The Ring*, the best story in the book and an extremely fine one.

If the author can achieve a permanent evenness of balance, can make his content more of a match for his style while also making the style more suited to the content, he will, I feel sure, become a major short-story writer. As it is he has produced one of the most welcome first collections for many a year. It is entertainment on a high level, and the beauty and evocative power of stories such as *Ballintierna in the Morning*, *Chestnut and Jet*, *The Good Dead in the Green Hills*, and *Sing, Milo, Sing*, are early landmarks in a career of outstanding promise.

D.M.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES



**PADRAIC COLUM:** Born in Longford, 1881. Was associated with W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory at the beginning of the Irish Theatre Movement, 1902, for which he wrote some plays. Besides many other plays, he has also written novels, poems, essays, and short stories. Is a well-known lecturer and critic in America where he now lives.

**LIAM O'FLAHERTY:** Born on the Aran Islands, 1896. Various jobs took him all over the world. Has written short stories and many novels. His latest collection of stories, *Two Lovely Beasts*, and a re-issue of his *Selected Stories*, appeared this year.

**L. A. G. STRONG:** Born Plymouth, 1896, of predominantly Irish parentage. Spent regular intervals of his youth near Dublin. Has written many books, including novels, short stories, and verse. Is a well-known broadcaster and an expert on dialects.

**DOMHNALL O'CONAILL:** Born Manchester, 1916, of Irish parents. Now lives in Dublin. His work has appeared in numerous Irish, British and American magazines and has been translated into Polish and Greek.

**MICHAEL LUCEY:** Born in Scilly, a village outside Kinsale, in 1926. Served in the Irish Army during the Emergency and is now in the R.A.S.C., stationed at Aldershot. His first story to be published appeared in IRISH WRITING No. 5.

**ROBERT O'DONOGHUE:** Born Cork, 1925. Has written and published articles and short stories. *Labour* is, however, his first poem to appear in print. Likes to write about what he has termed "lost streets with their lost people," and draws his subject matter from the less fortunate places in the city.

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SEAMUS DE FAOITE: Born Killarney, 1918. Educated at St. Brendan's Seminary. Is known as a writer and broadcaster in Ireland and has also had work published in American magazines. His plays have been produced in Dublin, and also by Radio Eireann and the B.B.C. Is married, has two sons, and works on a Dublin daily newspaper.

PATRICIA HUTCHINS: Born Ardnagashel, Bantry. Contributes to many Irish and British periodicals and also broadcasts. She is interested in documentary films and has frequently contributed to *Sight and Sound*.

JOHN HEWITT: Born Belfast, 1907. Graduated at Queen's University and is now Keeper of the Art Division of Belfast Museum and Art Gallery. He has lectured, broadcast, written art and literary criticism, and his verse has appeared in many Irish and British periodicals. A collection of verse, *No Rebel Word*, is due this year. At present doing research on early nineteenth-century Ulster poets.

VIVIAN MERCIER: Born Dublin, 1919. Was Scholar of Trinity College, Dublin, where he took degrees of Bachelor of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy. Is at present living in the U.S.A.

D. D. O'MAHONY: Has contributed short stories to various Irish periodicals and has had several radio plays produced.

CHRISTINE LONGFORD: Born Somerset, 1900. Educated at Oxford, she married the Earl of Longford in 1925, since when she has lived in Westmeath and Dublin. Has written a life of Vespasian, a Biography of Dublin, four novels and ten plays; and has also adapted novels for the stage, including *The Absentee*, by Maria Edgeworth.

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